

Qatar Emir visits Oman’s pavilion

Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on Wednesday visited the Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion at Doha International Book Fair. Oman is the guest of honour at the 33rd edition of Doha International Book Fair, held at Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre until May 18. The Emir of Qatar was briefed about various exhibits at the pavilion that reflect the Sultanate of Oman’s cultural, intellectual and historical heritage. **DETAILS ON P3**

SUNRISE - 05:24 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:01 AM

DHUHR - 12:08 PM

ASR - 03:31 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:47 PM

ISHA - 08:06 PM



HM gives audience to UN Secretary-General



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace to António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The audience reviewed the regional and international developments, particularly the situation in the Gaza Strip and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as the UN efforts to stop the war and bring aid to the Strip.

His Majesty also discussed with the UN Secretary-General the Omani-UN cooperation and means of backing the joint work

between the two sides.

The audience was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, and Hussein bin Ali bin Abdul Latif, Adviser at the Private Office. — ONA

Message from Algerian President



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria. It deals with bilateral relations and means of promoting them.

The message was handed over to His Majesty the Sultan when he gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday to

Ahmed Attaf, Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs and National Community Abroad.

During the audience, the minister conveyed greetings and best wishes of President Tebboune to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

On his turn, His Majesty asked him to convey his greetings and best wishes to the Algerian President and the people of Algeria.

The audience underlined the distinguished relations between Oman and Algeria.

It was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Hussein bin Ali bin Abdul Latif, Adviser at the Private Office, and Dr Mohammed Ali Bugazi, Ambassador of Algeria to Oman. — ONA

Sayyid Asaad to lead Oman’s delegation at Arab Summit

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, will lead the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation at the 33rd regular Arab Summit, due to be held on Thursday in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

HH Sayyid Asaad will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Delegate to the Arab League, and Sayyid Faisal bin Harib al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Bahrain, as well as the Secretary-General and the Adviser at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad.

The Sultanate of Oman’s participation in the 33rd Arab Summit in Manama affirms the permanent principles of Oman’s foreign policy and the country’s



steadfast support for all forms of joint Arab action aimed to achieve shared interests and support its issues of common concern.

Oman has maintained its supportive stance towards the League of Arab States to help the bloc accomplish its objectives and endeavours to realise economic integration that serves the aspirations of Arab peoples for security and stability amid crises and conflicts taking place in the region.

The Arab Summit (Bahrain Summit), to be convened for the first time in the history of the Kingdom, constitutes an important milestone in the march of joint Arab action.

SEE ALSO P2

Oman a ‘Peace builder’ in region: UN chief

MUSCAT: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, expressed his deep thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the extraordinary partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Nations.

In an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA), he hailed the Sultanate of Oman’s role and endeavours in resolving many regional issues. He described Oman as “peace builder” in the region.

The UN Secretary-General also described the Sultanate of Oman as “voice of wisdom”

and “indispensable partner” as it is respected by everyone. He added that Oman has proven its capacity to talk to global powers as it is an “honest partner”, highlighting its efforts for de-escalation and alleviating tensions in the region to promote regional security.

Guterres underscored the importance of the existing relations of cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the UN, as well as its various bodies. He also underlined Oman’s constant support for the UN efforts, as well as Oman’s unique role in creating conditions for

“The Sultanate of Oman is an indispensable partner as it is respected by everyone. It has proven its capacity to talk to global powers as it is an honest partner”

ANTÓNIO GUTERRES
UN Secretary-General

dialogue and reaching peace agreements in the region.

As for the current situation in the Gaza Strip, the UN Secretary-General stressed that the UN spares no efforts to mobilise all resources and capacities to serve the population in Gaza amidst tragic and extremely difficult conditions. He expressed his sorrow for the unprecedented number of civil victims.

Guterres appealed to countries with influence on Israel to open all crossing points to ensure the flow and access of humanitarian aid to all areas in the Gaza Strip.

TURN TO P2

OCCI launches two major initiatives

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, May 15

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) celebrated its 50th anniversary (Golden Jubilee) in a grand ceremony held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Wednesday.

HH Sayyid Theyazin launched the new identity as the OCCI strives to realise its requirements for the upcoming stage in line with the Oman Vision 2040 led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. HH



Sayyid Theyazin hailed the role played by the OCCI in representing the private sector and achieving sustainable development in accordance with the Oman Vision 2040 goals.

In his remarks, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI Board of Directors, welcomed the guests before tracing the chamber’s roots back to 1973, when it was established as a cornerstone of Oman’s economic system, drawing inspiration from the nation’s millennia-long tradition of trade.

TURN TO P2



OCCI celebrates golden jubilee, launches two major initiatives

FROM PAGE 1

“Since time immemorial,” Al Rawas elaborated, “Omani ships have traversed vast seas, while camels laden with commercial goods have ventured across expansive horizons. These journeys embodied Oman’s commitment to tolerance, peace, and coexistence among nations.”

Al Rawas underscored the chamber’s immense pride in receiving His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s recognition of its vital role in propelling the national economy. He described this commendation as “a testament, an honour, and a duty” that will guide the chamber in its pursuit of Oman Vision 2040. This national roadmap emphasises building a competitive economic infrastructure, achieving clear and robust economic leadership, and maintaining a legislative system that adapts seamlessly to future transformations, he noted.

AlRawas emphasised the pivotal role envisioned for the private sector under Oman Vision 2040, a vision that the current Board of



Directors actively embraces. He outlined the chamber’s strategic directions, focusing on its role as the official representative of the private sector. These directions prioritise improving the business environment, fostering economic development across the governorates, and driving economic diversification. Additionally, the chamber remains committed to establishing strong governance principles, enhancing the internal business environment,

and achieving successful digital transformation, he said.

The ceremony not only celebrated the OCCI’s golden jubilee but also marked the launch of a new visual identity for the chamber. More significantly, it witnessed the announcement of two crucial initiatives designed to bolster Oman’s economic development.

The establishment of the Social Investment Centre promises to transform impactful social

programmes and projects into sustainable ventures capable of generating lasting growth. Furthermore, the Centre for Economic Studies and Research will function as a hub for expertise and research, offering valuable insights across various economic and commercial fields. These initiatives demonstrate the OCCI’s unwavering commitment to adapting to contemporary needs and ensuring its continued relevance in the years to come.

ASDS HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING



MUSCAT: The Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS) held its annual meeting for this year under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, on Wednesday.

HH Sayyid Shihab commended the national roles undertaken by the Academy and the efforts made by the officials in charge of the Academy to achieve the desired goals. He called on the Academy’s affiliates and the participants of the 37th staff

and command course and the 11th national defence course to leverage the academic system and to continue improving the plans, policies and systems in order to keep pace with the academic changes and developments.

A visual presentation was staged that highlighted the academy’s departments, programmes for qualifying the participants and the most important activities and events carried out as part of the Academy’s annual plans. — ONA

Oman a ‘Peace builder’ in region: UN chief

FROM PAGE 1

He stressed at the same time the necessity of adopting an immediate and humanitarian cessation of all military operations in Gaza to end the continuing suffering of civilians.

He also underscored the importance of putting an end to the war in the Gaza Strip and pushing efforts towards achieving the two-state solution and granting Palestine full sovereignty over its lands.

Regarding the international efforts to grant Palestine full membership in the United Nations, the UN Secretary-General touched on the challenges facing the United Nations, which was established in 1945 after the World War II. These challenges represented in the current global divisions and geopolitical developments, he added. — ONA

King of the Belgians confers ‘Order of the Crown’ on OPAZ Chairman

BRUSSELS: Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, has conferred the “Order of the Crown” on Dr Ali bin Masoud bin Ali al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ). Besides expressing the Belgian monarch’s appreciation for Al Sunaidy’s role in strengthening economic relations with the Kingdom of Belgium, the conferment of the Order of the Crown was in confirmation of Oman-Belgium longstanding relations.

The medal was handed over to Al Sunaidy on Wednesday by Hadja Lahbib, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Foreign Trade and the Federal Cultural Institutions, at Egmont Palace in Brussels.

The ceremony was attended by Ru’aa bint Issa al Zadjalayah, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Belgium,



Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy

and a number of ambassadors, officials and businessmen from the Belgian side.

Al Sunaidy expressed his thanks and appreciation for the King of the Belgians, hoping that bilateral relations will see further growth.

— ONA

Foreign Minister receives UN Secretary-General

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister received on Wednesday António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) and his accompanying delegation, within the context of his current official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides underlined the cooperation relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Nations and its various bodies. They commended the fruitful partnerships and initiatives, including humanitarian and environmental initiatives and areas of sustainable development, as well as supporting efforts to achieve peace and stability and uphold the values of justice and the international order based on



The two sides reviewed the current challenges facing the world, in addition to the catastrophic conditions in the Gaza Strip. — ONA

the UN Charter and international law.

They also reviewed the current challenges facing the world, in addition to the catastrophic conditions in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian territories in light of the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation and practices of random killing and destruction, which violate all international

conventions and humanitarian norms and contribute to the exacerbation of human suffering.

Sayyid Badr stressed the need to hold Israel responsible for these practices, with the pressing need to achieve an immediate ceasefire, lift the siege and allow humanitarian aid to enter without any obstacles. He affirmed that the international community, especially the Security

Council, has a major and central responsibility in this context.

On his turn, the UN Secretary-General lauded the tangible role of the Sultanate of Oman in baking peace and stability efforts and bringing viewpoints closer by encouraging regional and international dialogue and understanding.

The two sides stressed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be settled through the two-state solution and by ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, as well as establishing an independent Palestinian state in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy embodied in the relevant Security Council resolutions.

— ONA

Oman’s participation in Arab Summit to enhance Joint Action

MANAMA: The Sultanate of Oman’s participation in the 33rd Arab Summit in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, to be held on Thursday May 16, affirms the permanent principles of Oman’s foreign policy and the country’s steadfast support for all forms of joint Arab action aimed to achieve shared interests and support its issues of common concern.

The Sultanate of Oman has maintained its supportive stance towards the League of Arab States to help the bloc accomplish its objectives and endeavours to realise economic integration that serves the aspirations of Arab peoples for security and stability amid crises and conflicts taking place in the region.

The Arab Summit (Bahrain Summit), to be convened for the first time in the history of the Kingdom, constitutes an important milestone in the march of joint Arab action. The summit assumes significance due to the fact that it takes place amid many serious challenges, most notably the Israeli occupation forces’



Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi

military escalation in the Gaza Strip and other occupied Palestinian territories.

The grave injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people requires all to close ranks and achieve Arab solidarity in support of the just Palestinian cause. The current circumstance necessitates the adoption of constructive decisions that contribute to the consolidation of efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the region, and then launch a new stage in joint Arab action.

Besides enhancing cooperation for promoting mechanisms of



The Arab Summit constitutes important milestone in march of Arab action. — ONA

joint Arab action and maintaining consultation among brethren about issues of common destiny, the Bahrain Summit also accords priority to measures on charting out paths of prosperity for the people of the region and its future generations.

The summit’s agenda is scheduled to cover a range of issues. This includes the follow-up of the implementation of decisions and commitments made during the Arab summit presidency’s 32nd meeting held in Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian issue, Arab national security affairs, the unstable conditions in some Arab countries and foreign

interventions in the affairs of Arab states. The agenda includes a review of international political affairs, including the convening of the Second Arab-Chinese Summit and the establishment of the Partnership Forum between the League of Arab States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

It will also deal with discussions on economic, social, media and legal affairs, climate change issues, the amended Arab Human Rights Strategy (first periodic review of 2024) and the Arab Media Strategy, as well as joint efforts to combat terrorism, maintain Arab national



Faisal bin Hareb al Busaidy

security and draft resolutions submitted by the Economic and Social Council.

Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its permanent representative to the League of Arab States, said in a statement to the Oman News Agency that Oman’s keenness on Arab solidarity is characterised by its active participation in Arab meetings. These include consultation between Oman’s Foreign Ministry and its counterparts in the Arab countries. In these meetings, Oman assumed a

forward stance lauded by all parties, said al Rahbi, noting that Oman has had a strong presence in all meetings of the Arab League.

Al Rahbi added that the Palestinian issue constitutes the main axis and the most prominent topic in the current summit, which, he explained, will showcase more Arab solidarity amid the current challenges posed to the Arab nation and due to other global political developments.

For his part, Faisal bin Hareb al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Bahrain, said that the Kingdom of Bahrain’s hosting the Arab Summit constitutes a landmark of political significance in the aftermath of many regional challenges, threats and disputes.

Al Busaidy said in a statement to the Oman News Agency that the Sultanate of Oman, since joining the League of Arab States on 29 September 1971, has harnessed all its efforts in support of Arab solidarity through participation in all Arab summits.



Glimpses of Oman’s rich culture and heritage at Doha book fair

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The Sultanate of Oman is showcasing its rich cultural, heritage and academic legacy at the ongoing Doha International Book Fair. This 10-day event, which commenced on May 9, offers a multitude of attractions for all age groups.

The fair has drawn a substantial number of exhibitors and visitors from across the globe, presenting Oman with an excellent opportunity to introduce its beauty and culture to a diverse audience.

Oman’s participation in international exhibitions and forums underscores its commitment to global cultural exchange, making such platforms crucial for attracting numerous exhibitors and visitors from various countries. The Doha International Book Fair holds significant regional, Arab and international stature among book fairs, providing a comprehensive window for visitors to explore diverse aspects of Omani culture.

This year, Oman’s participation is noteworthy as the country



Emir of Qatar visits Oman’s pavilion

DOHA: Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on Wednesday visited the Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion at Doha International Book Fair.

Oman is the guest of honour at the 33rd edition of Doha International Book Fair, held at Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre until May 18, 2024.

is the guest of honour for the 33rd edition of the fair, themed “With Knowledge, Civilisations Are Built.” Represented by 17

The Emir of Qatar was briefed about various exhibits at the pavilion that reflect the Sultanate of Oman’s cultural, intellectual and historical heritage.

He also took note of recent books, publications and rare Omani manuscripts put on display by different institutions and authorities concerned.

— ONA

publishing houses, the Omani pavilion stands out amidst the participation of over 515 publishing houses from 42

countries. Visitors to the Omani pavilion are taken on a journey through various books that reflect the culture and civilisation of Oman. The pavilion features a collection of Omani cultural elements registered on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, alongside rare manuscripts dating back a thousand years.

These displays offer a glimpse into the Sultanate’s rich heritage, traditions and customs, narrating stories about Oman’s distinctive literature, arts and culture, while also promoting its tourism, cultural and civilisational assets.

Oman’s presence at international forums is vital for promoting tourism and raising awareness about its cultural and historical wealth.

This participation aims to introduce the world to Oman’s vision, aspirations, goals and the opportunities that arise from them across different sectors.

It also reaffirms the collaborative roles and responsibilities of governmental and private agencies in implementing and highlighting Oman’s vision both locally and internationally.



ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES US OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received here Brett McGurk, Deputy Assistant to the US President and National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa. The meeting reviewed a number of current regional and international issues. It also touched on aspects of joint cooperation and stressed the friendship relations and partnership between Oman and the USA. — ONA

10th Nusuk exhibition highlights Haj rituals

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The 10th edition of the Nusuk exhibition, which aims to teach the rituals of Haj in addition to introducing the tasks of the Omani Haj Mission and the services it provides in the holy lands, was held under the auspices of Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiyah, Executive President for Oman Medical Specialty Board, at the lecture hall of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, in Bausher on Tuesday.

The Nusuk exhibition showcased the various facets of the holy ritual, a prerogative for a Muslim, delved deep into the activities that happen at the holy land and the etiquettes to be followed round the clock during the pilgrimage.

Speaking to the Observer, a representatives from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, said that the first official Omani pilgrimage mission was formed in 1972 by a Royal order from late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and it was headed by Shaikh Sulaiman

bin Mohammed al Salmi, who was Director of Governors’ Affairs at the Ministry of Interior and Justice at the time.

The Haj Mission, which comprises representatives from the Ministry, Department of Fatwa, Administrative and Financial sections, ROP, Oman Scouts, media, medical, and various Haj companies, will depart Oman during the first week of June.

The structure of the Haj Mission comprises the head of the mission, his deputy and his adviser.

Together, the team will draw up general policies for the work entrusted to the mission, and supervise all the services and care that must be provided to the pilgrims.

Sultan al Hinai, a representative of the ministry, said that the first flight carrying pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman will leave Muscat during the first week of June and this will be followed by regular flights carrying other pilgrims in the following days.



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Tangible solutions driving sustainability in Oman

Oman has been actively promoting sustainable practices in its blue and green economies, which is why The Correspondent’s latest edition (May) looks into the developments of these two crucial economies.

With a meticulous focus on real-world impact, this edition goes beyond rhetoric, delving into tangible solutions driving Oman’s sustainability agenda. From waste management innovations to cutting-edge sustainable construction techniques, each story underscores Oman’s determination to lead by example in the global fight against climate change.

Readers are immersed in the journey of waste cooking



oil’s transformation into biodiesel, powering Oman’s circular economy while reducing its environmental footprint.

This shift not only emphasises Oman’s environmental responsibility, but also showcases the nation’s economic foresight.

Moreover, the magazine spotlights Oman’s groundbreaking strides in sustainable construction, leveraging 3D printing technology to revolutionise the industry. This innovative approach not only minimises environmental impact, but also sets a precedent for sustainable urban

development worldwide.

At the heart of this edition is a look into the cultural significance and economic impact of the rose harvest season and how this popular yearly tradition can be developed by learning from initiatives of neighbouring countries.

In addition, Oman’s adoption of biochar technology stands out as a game-changer in climate change mitigation efforts. By prioritising greener farming practices, Oman demonstrates its commitment to long-term environmental sustainability and food security.

This insightful edition is available for download on Oman Daily Observer’s website, www.omanobserver, on the app, and across all major social media channels.

Oman, Korea celebrate 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations

MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Muscat and the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday held a ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The ceremony also saw the launch of a commemorative slogan incarnating the depth and strength of diplomatic relations.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, said, “Partnership between Oman and the Republic of Korea is undergoing steady progress in green hydrogen and clean energy sector, among other

sectors.” Al Harthy pointed out that the authorities concerned are currently embarked on easing visa formalities for Omanis wishing to enter the Republic of Korea.

Trade exchange between the two countries in 2023 stood at more than \$5 billion, said Al Harthy, noting that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on “establishing a framework to enhance trade and investment” was recently signed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (Oman) and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea.

In a speech on the occasion,



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Kiejoo Kim, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Sultanate of Oman, hailed relations between the two countries. He pointed out that the Republic of Korea is the

third largest trading partner of the Sultanate of Oman and that the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries stood at more than \$5 billion in 2023.

Speaking about measures that would further enhance trade and economic exchange, Kim quoted the free trade agreement (FTA) between the Republic of Korea and

GCC states, a bilateral trade and investment promotion framework and a set of agreements inked by the two sides.

Kim stressed the importance of Oman Vision 2040 in consolidating joint efforts to upgrade cooperation through more future-oriented partnerships in the areas of renewable energy, environment-related technology and other sectors.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Korea in 1974 paved the way for cooperation in many political, diplomatic, economic and cultural spheres. — ONA



WHOEVER VIOLATES THE PROVISIONS HEREOF SHALL BE ADMINISTRATIVELY FINED
RO 1,000
AND THE FINE SHALL BE DOUBLED UPON REPEATING THE VIOLATION



IN CASE OF THE CONTINUATION OF VIOLATION, AN ADMINISTRATIVE FINE OF
RO 50
FOR EACH DAY OF VIOLATION SHALL BE IMPOSED



ROP ON WEDNESDAY REPORTED THAT THE COAST GUARD POLICE BOATS IN DHOFAR GOVERNORATE ARRESTED FOUR PEOPLE WHILE TRYING TO SMUGGLE MORE THAN

38,000
BAGS OF CHEWING TOBACCO

GROWING CONCERN OVER SMOKELESS TOBACCO



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Rules and regulations are in place, but what might be required in the fight against chewable tobacco could be public awareness and will.

While trading of chewable tobacco is banned, there have been incidents of smuggling the goods.

The Royal Oman Police on Wednesday reported that the Coast Guard police boats in Dhofar Governorate arrested four people while trying to smuggle more than 38,000 bags of chewing tobacco, and legal procedures were being completed.

Chewing tobacco comes under the category of smokeless tobacco. In Oman, the Consumer Protection Authority introduced Resolution No 301, 2016, amending Resolution No 256 of 2015, banning the trading of chewing (smokeless) tobacco; and in accordance with public interest, it was decided that Article One and

Article Two of the above-mentioned Resolution No 256 of 2015 shall be replaced with: ‘Without prejudice to the penalties prescribed under the above-mentioned Consumer Protection Law, whoever violates the provisions hereof shall be administratively fined RO 1,000 and the fine shall be doubled upon repeating the violation.

In case of the continuation of violation, an administrative fine of RO 50 for each day of violation shall be imposed, provided that the total fine shall not exceed RO 2,000.

The seized amounts of chewing (smokeless) tobacco shall be destroyed in accordance with the applicable regulations of the Public Authority for Consumer Protection.’

The Sultanate of Oman became a Party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on June 7, 2005.

Way back in 2001, the ministerial decision from



THE REASON STRICT MEASURES ARE TAKEN AGAINST THE USE OF CHEWABLE TOBACCO IS BECAUSE OF HEALTH CONCERNS. ACCORDING TO LUNG.ORG, SMOKELESS TOBACCO CONTAINS AT LEAST
28
CANCER CAUSING CHEMICALS REFERRED TO CARCINOGENS

the Commerce ministry had stated that cigarettes and other tobacco products shall not be imported or displayed for sale except when an amount of nicotine in the tobacco of a single cigarette shall not exceed 0.6 mg, amount of tar in the tobacco of a single cigarette not exceeding 10 mg, amount of carbon monoxide in the tobacco of a single cigarette not exceeding 12 mg, number of cigarettes in a single pack shall not exceed 20 cigarettes, batch number shall be written on each pack of cigarettes and other tobacco products and on its shipping document.

Such information shall be clearly and legibly written in Arabic on each pack of cigarettes or other tobacco products. It may be written in any other foreign language next to the Arabic — percentage of tar and nicotine and health warning on the front side of a pack. But these requirements are overlooked by the producers and consumers of chewable tobaccos.

The reason strict measures are taken against the use of chewable tobacco is because of health concerns. According to Lung.org, smokeless tobacco contains at least 28 cancer causing chemicals referred to carcinogens.

The diseases that are linked to the usage of smokeless tobacco use are gum disease, tooth decay, tooth loss and the formation of white or gray patches inside the mouth called leukoplakia that could lead to cancer.

A publication by WHO (Eastern Mediterranean Region) pointed out that the health dangers of smokeless tobacco use are little understood by users.

In its recommendations, WHO states that smokeless tobacco use should be included in tobacco control efforts and should include education of the public and health professionals about the health risks of smokeless tobacco users as well as cessation interventions for smokeless tobacco users.



HIV, SYPHILIS AND HEPATITIS B

Unicef workshop highlights elimination of transmissions

MUSCAT: Unicef in partnership with PENTA, WHO and IOM 1, is hosting a regional capacity-building training on triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, Syphilis and Hepatitis B.

The workshop, taking place from May 14 to 16, was opened under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim bin Saif al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, at the Ministry of Health.

The training aims to strengthen

existing capacities to prevent vertical transmission of HIV from mother to child and improve diagnostic, therapeutic and preventive services for children, women and youth.

It shares experiences and best practices, focusing on obtaining certification for eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B. Emphasis is on integrating the triple elimination interventions within maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health programmes as part of



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an integrated community based primary healthcare systems strengthening and addressing barriers to services for women,

children and youth.

“This training is a crucial step towards achieving our goal; that no child is born with HIV,

syphilis or hepatitis B. While we join forces and unite our efforts and resources, sustained commitment and investment from governments are essential to bridge the gaps and reach marginalised communities,” said Sowmya Kadandale, Unicef Regional Health Advisor.

The training includes healthcare providers from ministries of health from 11 countries in the region. It responds to the need to increase prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care of the three diseases in pregnant women,

especially women in marginalised and vulnerable populations.

Many pregnant women living with HIV are missing out on treatment to protect their health and prevent their infants from acquiring HIV. Coverage of these vital interventions stood at a low 23 per cent in 2022 and has improved little in the past five years. Oman’s progress in maintaining certification for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and Syphilis is a celebrated highlight of these efforts.

UTAS Musandam opens

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The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) will open its branch in Musandam Governorate on Thursday, under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, within the framework of plans to develop Musandam Governorate to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development.

The government seek to develop various governorates and emphasis for great economic diversification based on the competitive capabilities that the governorate possesses as well as keeping in line with Oman Vision 2040 in its priority for education, learning, scientific research and national capabilities that would contribute to supporting the process of development of technical and applied education.

Being one of the important higher education systems in the Sultanate of Oman, UTAS contributes to preparing and qualifying national cadres with quality and efficiency in which are compatible with the needs of the labour market.

The establishing a branch of the university in Musandam as the first branch of a government university in the governorate, is an important pillar due to its presence in a strategic location overlooking the Strait of Hormuz.

The branch had received approximately 150 students from the first batch to study during the second semester of the academic year 2023/2024 in a number of specialisations.

Indian School students excel in CBSE exams

MUSCAT: Students of Classes 10 and 12 of Indian Schools in Oman have braved all odds to come out with flying colours in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) results announced recently.

The 2024 results of the CBSE Board have set an all-time record for the Indian Schools in Oman with an increased percentage of high achievers as compared to previous years, thereby setting another benchmark of excellence in academics.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman congratulated the students who have made their alma mater and parents proud with outstanding results. He lauded the unflinching support of the Principals who rolled out creative measures to enhance and improve the results and the efforts of the School Managements that have made all efforts to set higher benchmark of success in the Board Exams.

“All stakeholders in education had pulled together to ensure that students did their best by providing a very positive educational environment. It is the efforts of the teachers in doing the continuous follow-up; and parents with their unstinting support that helped the students perform to their best,” said Dr Sivakumar Manickam while congratulating the students and the schools for the stupendous results.

For Oman toppers, the first position was claimed by Yadu Krishna Balakrishnan of Indian School Darsait with 99 per cent, Sadiya Khatoon (Indian School Salalah) and Aman Saji (Indian School Sohar) claimed the second position with 98 per cent marks. The third place was also claimed by two students with 97.8 per cent marks: Nityant Kaarthik Rao of Indian School Muscat and Ojas Pandey of Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Oman Cancer Association invites the experienced and specialized, Excellent and First Grade Contractors to participate in the tender process and submit their best offers, for the construction of the Oman Cancer Association's New Headquarters at Airport Heights ("Project"). The Project encompasses a full built-up area of approximately 30,200 square meters, and the selected bidder will assume the role of the main contractor.

The following are the tender purchase details in relation to the Project:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Day for Purchase of the Tender Documents	Last Day for Proposal Submission	Tender Document Fee
LV2024/OCA/T/01	Construction of Oman Cancer Association's New Headquarters	23/05/2024	04/07/2024	1,000 OMR

- Interested bidders are to submit an official "Expression of Interest" letter (EOI) to the following email addresses, indicating their willingness to participate in the said tender:
 - To: Tender@linesandvisions.com
 - Cc: info@oca.om
- Interested bidders shall transfer the aforesaid Tender Fee to the following bank account and must attach the fee transfer receipt with the EOI letter and NO CASH will be accepted:
 - Account Number: 0315004093350018
 - Bank: Bank Muscat
 - Account Name: Oman Cancer Association
- THE BID SUBMISSION AND ANY INQUIRIES AND CLARIFICATIONS, please contact:
 - Technical Inquiries: Tender@linesandvisions.com
 - Submission: tender@oca.om
- Full Tender Documents will be issued to the interested bidders via email as a link (digital copy) and the bidder must acknowledge the receipt of the same. Bidders to note that the Oman Cancer Association is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested bidders will be requested to sign an NDA after purchasing the tender.



مسقط للمقاصة والإيداع
Muscat Clearing & Depository

MUSCAT CLEARING & DEPOSITORY COMPANY (S.A.O.G) MCD
POST BOX 952, CODE 112, RUWI, MUSCAT, SULTANATE OF OMAN

hereby gives Notice of following Tender:

Tender No	Description	Eligibility	Participation Charges	Sale of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Proposal by Vendors (Response to RFP)
CSD/2024/C001	Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Clearing, Settlement & Depository System	Vendors specialized in this field	OMR 500/= (Non-refundable)	16-05-2024 to 23-05-2024	27-06-2024

Tender Documents (RFP) shall be obtained from Administration & Finance Department (email: 'Yahya Al Salmi' alsalmi@mcd.om), Muscat Clearing & Depository, First Floor, MBD, RUWI, Sultanate of Oman (Tel.: +968-24822207) during office hours after paying the participation charges mentioned above, to be paid into MCD Bank account details provided below.

All Vendors who are bidding must provide a bank guarantee from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (2%) of the tender value on behalf of MUSCAT CLEARING & DEPOSITORY COMPANY, valid for 90 days from the date of submission of the proposal in response to the RFP.

MCD 's Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract Agreement shall be applicable.

MCD is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Tender.

MCD Bank Account details:-

Bank Name & Branch : Bank Dhofar, MBD Branch
Bank Account Name : Muscat Clearing & Depository Company
Bank Account Number : 01010010875001
SWIFT/BIC Code : BDOFOMRXXXX



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) TENDER

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Dates		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
1/2024	Design, supply, implementation, management & support of OAAAQA Core Services digital transformation solution	Excellent and First	40 OMR	29/05/2024	6/06/2024	26/06/2024

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation & Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) is hereby inviting all local, regional & international specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents.

For project brief, please visit the below link:

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

A. Purchase of Tender Documents

The Bidders may obtain the TENDER document by registering the company at eTendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

B. Submission

All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the eTendering System ONLY.

C. Correspondence Tender Inquiry:

All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.

e. Tendering System Inquiry:

All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

All correspondence pertaining to the OAAAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number:

tenders@oaaaqa.gov.om and +968 24121706

OAAAQA Business Hours

Sunday – Thursday, 7:30 – 14:30 Oman Time, (+4 UTC)

OAAAQA Business Hours are to be considered in all correspondences.



An injured man is comforted by another as he lies on a horse-pulled cart in the al Zaitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City on Wednesday. – AFP

RAFAH OPERATION COULD LAST WEEKS

CAIRO/JERUSALEM: Israeli troops battled Hamas fighters across Gaza on Wednesday, including in the southern city of Rafah that had been a refuge for civilians, in an upsurge of the more than seven-month war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians.

Antagonism between Israel and the United Nations worsened as the Israeli army sought an explanation for footage showing armed men next to UN Palestinian relief agency vehicles. Separately, India was working to bring home the body of a UN staffer killed in Rafah by what the global body said was tank fire.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's army has in recent days pressed into the east of Rafah in pursuit of what it says are four Hamas battalions, despite warnings from its ally the US and others to hold off to avoid mass civilian casualties.

Since Hamas' October 7 attack, Israel has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, with 82 dead on Tuesday in the highest single-day toll for weeks.

In the northern Jabalia district, residents said Israeli tanks had destroyed clusters of homes but were facing heavy resistance from Hamas and its ally Islamic Jihad. "They are bombing houses on top of their inhabitants," said Abu Jihad. Islamic Jihad said it killed some foot soldiers in Jabalia, while Israel's military said it eliminated many gunmen in an area where it had declared major operations over months ago — but had also pledged to return to prevent armed factions regrouping.

Israeli tanks have been massed around the eastern edges of Rafah and in recent days have been probing into built-up areas of the city, where hundreds of



A boy sits amid the debris of a building destroyed by Israeli bombardment in Gaza on Wednesday. – AFP

thousands of displaced people have been sheltering from fighting elsewhere. Residents said Israeli

forces had pushed into three neighbourhoods and Palestinian gunmen were trying to prevent soldiers and tanks moving

towards the centre. Israel said its troops targeted a training compound, killing militants in close-quarters combat

and finding many weapons. Israel reported one death in south Gaza which public broadcaster Kan said was the first such fatality since the start of the Rafah ground operation last week. Netanyahu told CNBC broadcaster the operation could last weeks.

In the north, Israel said it had concluded an operation in the Zeitoun area. Residents said tanks had pulled back from the area, with dozens of homes destroyed or damaged, while Palestinian medics said dozens of civilians had been killed and wounded.

Israel said its troops had identified fighters in the central logistics compound of the UN Palestinian relief agency UNRWA east of Rafah, demanding an explanation. Reuters verified the location of video released by the Israeli army but could not verify when it was filmed or the identity of the men. — Reuters

Palestinians mark 1948 Nakba in the shadow of war in Gaza

GAZA: Palestinians commemorated the 1948 "Nakba" or catastrophe, on Wednesday, marking the time when hundreds of thousands were dispossessed of their homes in the war at the birth of the state of Israel, as fighting raged amid the rubble in Gaza.

The Nakba has been one of the defining experiences for Palestinians for more than 75 years, helping to shape their national identity and casting its shadow on their conflicted relationship with Israel in the decades since.

This year's commemoration has been dominated by the plight of around two million Palestinians in Gaza, most of whom are living in temporary shelters after being displaced from their homes by the Israeli campaign launched in the wake of the Hamas-led attack on Israel last October.

"There is no catastrophe worse than this one," said 80-year-old



Palestinian protesters take to the streets of the West Bank city of Ramallah on Wednesday to mark the 76th anniversary of the "Nakba" or "Catastrophe" of the creation of Israel, which sparked the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948. – AFP

“Our homes have gone, our children have gone, our property has gone, our gold has gone — nothing is left. What is left for us to cry over?”

UMM MOHAMMED
Nakba survivor

Umm Mohammed, who survived the original Nakba as a child in the southern town of Beersheba before coming to Gaza, where she has spent most of her life and where she now lives in a tent in the southern city of Rafah.

"I've been here for about 80 years and a catastrophe like this, I have not seen. Our homes have gone, our children have gone, our property has gone, our gold has

gone, our incomes have gone — nothing is left. What is left for us to cry over?"

The seven-month-old Israeli campaign, which has left much of the Gaza Strip a wasteland of rubble and wrecked buildings, has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians and displaced most of the population, drawing fears among many of a second Nakba in which they would be forced from Gaza altogether.

For many of the descendants of the 1948 refugees, keeping the memory alive of what their parents and grandparents lost remains an important priority. But for some, the experience of the past months has superseded the old stories of families being driven from their villages.

"My mother and father told me about the Nakba, the first one, but this Nakba here is worse," said 58-year-old Faridah Abu Artema, sitting in a tent encampment near Rafah. — Reuters

India: Working to repatriate UN staffer killed in Gaza

NEW DELHI: India said on Wednesday it was working to repatriate the body of a former Indian Army officer serving as a UN staffer, who was killed in Gaza when his vehicle was hit by what the UN said was tank fire in Rafah where only Israeli tanks are present.

The staffer, Waibhav Anil Kale (pictured), was working with the UN Department of Safety and Security and was heading to the European Hospital in Rafah along with a colleague, who was wounded in the incident. The UN said he was the first international UN staffer killed in Gaza since the war began on October 7, taking the total UN death toll to 191.

UN Secretary-General's deputy spokesperson said the UN had set up a fact-finding panel to determine the responsibility for Kale's death.

Asked by reporters about the shots fired on the vehicle, he said, "We believe it came from a tank in the area" and later added, it was "safe" to assume that only the IDF tanks in that region. — AFP





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THURSDAY | MAY 16 | 2024

7

In brief

■ ATHENS



GREECE ARSONISTS TO FACE STIFFER SENTENCES: MINISTER

Greece's civil protection minister on Wednesday warned that arsonists would face stiffer sentences, as wildfires started earlier than usual in the Mediterranean country.

"The penal code has changed, negligent arson is no longer a misdemeanour," Vassilis Kikilias told private Talk Radio, referring to modifications that entered into force this month.

Perpetrators can face up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to 200,000 euros (\$217,000).

In April, there was anger after a Greek misdemeanours court handed suspended sentences to six out of 21 suspects over the country's deadliest fire disaster that claimed 104 lives in 2018.

■ PARIS



4 DEAD IN RIOTS, STATE OF EMERGENCY LIKELY IN NEW CALEDONIA

France will declare a state of emergency on the Pacific island of New Caledonia on Wednesday after three young indigenous Kanak and a police official were killed in riots over electoral reform. The state of emergency will give authorities additional powers to ban gatherings and forbid people from moving around the French-ruled island.

Police reinforcements have been sent to the island after rioters torched vehicles and businesses and looted stores. Schools have been shut. "Since the start of the week, New Caledonia has been hit by violence of a rare intensity," said Prime Minister Gabriel Attal.

■ LONDON



BOIL WATER WARNING IN UK'S DEVON AFTER PARASITE FOUND

Residents in part of Devon in southwestern England were warned on Wednesday to boil water before consuming it after the region's water utility found traces of an intestinal parasite that can cause diarrhoea and vomiting. South West Water issued the notice to its customers in Alston and the Hillhead area of Brixham, and said it was urgently investigating the source of the contamination.

Regular dumping of raw sewage in rivers and seas has sparked anger in Britain, with privatised water companies accused of failing to invest in infrastructure and of routinely dumping sewage in waterways.

Slovakia PM fights for life after being shot

BRATISLAVA: Slovakia Prime Minister Robert Fico was on Wednesday shot multiple times and rushed to hospital with life-threatening injuries after a cabinet meeting, officials said, in an attack condemned by EU chiefs.

Fico, a populist leader accused of being Kremlin-friendly, has been prime minister since last year.

"Today, after the government meeting in Handlova, there was an assassination attempt on the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico," the government said in a post on social media.

"He is currently being transported by helicopter to Banska Bystrica in a life-threatening condition, because it would take too long to get to Bratislava due to the necessity of an acute intervention," it said.

Fico was shot multiple times, said a post on his official Facebook page.

"We confirm the attack on the prime minister," police spokesman Matej Neumann said.

Handlova local hospital director Marta Eckhardtova said "Fico was brought into our hospital and he was treated at our vascular surgery clinic."

She was unable to describe his injuries.

The Dennik N daily said its reporter heard several shots fired and then saw security guards lift the premier off the ground and into a car.

The newspaper also reported that police had detained the suspected gunman.

Slovak President Zuzana Caputova said she was "utterly shocked by today's brutal and reckless attack on Slovakia's prime minister... which I condemn in



Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico

(the) strongest possible terms".

"I wish him a lot of strength in this critical moment and early recovery," she said on X, formerly Twitter. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala also called the news of the attack "shocking".

"I hope the prime minister will get well as soon as possible. We must not tolerate violence, it must have no place in society," he said on X.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said: "Robert, my thoughts are with you in this very difficult moment".

As well as his current stint as premier, Fico also headed the government in 2006-10 and 2012-18. Since he was elected last October, Fico has made a string of remarks that have soured ties between Slovakia and neighbouring Ukraine.

He has notably questioned Ukraine's sovereignty and called for a compromise with Russia.

He also sparked mass protests with controversial changes, including a media law that critics say will undermine the impartiality of public television and radio.

At a press conference following the shooting, MP Lubos Blaha from Fico's Smer party lashed out against his



A person is detained after a shooting incident of Slovak PM Robert Fico, after a Slovak government meeting in Handlova on Wednesday. — Reuters

critics. "You, the liberal media, and progressive politicians are to blame. Robert Fico is fighting for his life because of your hatred," Blaha said.

Fico took power for the fourth time last October and has turned the country's foreign policy towards more pro-Russian views.

He has also initiated reforms of criminal law and the media, which have raised concerns over weakening the rule of law.

During a three-decade career, Fico, 59, has skilfully weaved between pro-European mainstream and nationalistic anti-Brussels and anti-American positions, while showing a willingness to change course depending on public opinion or changed political realities.

He embraced more extreme positions over the past four years that include strident criticisms

of western allies, pledges to stop military support for Kyiv, opposition to sanctions on Russia and threats to veto any future Nato membership invite for Ukraine.

His coalition halted Slovak official shipments of weapons for Ukraine and he has spoken about what he called western influence in the war which only led to Slavic nations killing each other.

Fico has remained steady throughout his career, however, on promises to protect living standards of those left behind in a country where conditions for many are only slowly catching up to western Europe and where many hold relatively fond memories of a communist-era past.

"Fico is a technician of power, by far the best in Slovakia. He does not have a counterpart at the moment," said sociologist Michal

Vasecka, from the Bratislava Policy Institute. "Fico is always following opinion polls, understands what is happening" in society.

His campaign call of "Not a single round" for Ukraine appealed to voters in the nation of 5.5 million where only a minority in the Nato member country believe Russia is at fault for the Ukraine war.

Fico, who analysts see inspired by Hungary's Viktor Orban, has said he has Slovak interests at heart and wants the war to end. Western allies and Ukraine say halting military aid to Kyiv would only help Russia.

"We see Viktor Orban as one of those European politicians who do not fear to openly defend the interests of Hungary and Hungarian people," Fico said in e-mailed responses last year.

— Agencies

Manhunt in France for gunmen who staged deadly ambush to free inmate

PARIS: A huge manhunt continues in France for the gunmen who ambushed a prison van, shot dead two guards in the vehicle, and then set free the inmate known as "The Fly" who was being transported.

Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, speaking on broadcaster RTL, described the search as "unprecedented" and said that all resources were being deployed to free the assailants who staged the brazen attack that unfolded in northern France on Tuesday. A car rammed the van carrying the prisoner, forcing it to come to a stop near a highway tollbooth near Incarville. Then another vehicle with gunmen inside came up from behind. The perpetrators got outside of their cars and opened fire on the van using machine guns.

One of the guards killed leaves behind two children, while the other has a wife who is five months pregnant, authorities said. Three other people were injured.

The prisoner was then able to flee together with four attackers.

The 30-year-old, nicknamed "The Fly," was previously sentenced to 18 months in prison



An outside view of the Evreux prison, Normandy, a day after one of its inmates, Mohamed Amra, was freed by gunmen in a murderous motorway attack. — AFP

for burglary and aggravated theft, among other offences. He is also accused of premeditated murder and deprivation of liberty in other cases.

French media reported that he had contacts with organised crime and that not long before Tuesday's attack he tried to saw through the bars in his cell to free himself.

Two cars have since been found a few kilometres away from the scene, which could be the escape vehicles. However, there was no trace of the perpetrators.

The prisoner transport was not escorted by the police. Unions are

now calling for better protection for prison officers and more staff.

Mohamed Amra has close links to organised crime, said another source close to the case who asked not to be identified, and is suspected of ordering killings linked to the drugs trade.

Another source who asked not to be named said Amra runs his own drug trafficking network.

However, none of his 13 prior convictions — for crimes ranging from armed robbery to extortion — were directly related to the narcotics business, said Beccuau, who is leading the investigation into the motorway attack. — dpa

Singapore swears in its first new PM in 20 decades

SINGAPORE: Singapore's Lawrence Wong was sworn in on Wednesday as its first new premier in 20 years and only its fourth leader since independence, capping off a carefully calibrated power transfer aimed at ensuring continuity in the wealthy city-state.

Wong, 51, comes from among a crop of so-called "4G" leaders, a new generation of politicians that were hand-picked by the long-ruling People's Action Party (PAP) to take over the reins of the key Asian trade and financial centre.

He is the first Singaporean leader born after its independence in 1965. Wong will retain his current position as finance minister and takes charge of a country led for two decades by Lee Hsien Loong, the 72-year-old son of Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of modern Singapore who stayed in politics until his death in 2015.

The succession has been long coming, with Lee's plans of stepping down before he turned 70 upended by the pandemic, and by a transition fumble when his anointed successor unexpectedly ruled himself out of the running in 2021.

Wong has pledged to lead "with humility and a deep sense of duty" towards Singapore and its 5.9 million people and devote "every ounce of my energy" to the people.

Wong rose to prominence in 2020 as co-chair of the pandemic taskforce and was named Lee's successor in April 2022 after a series of consultations between the political leadership and Wong's peers.

— AFP



Singapore's new Prime Minister Lawrence Wong shakes hands with Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong as he is sworn in as Singapore's fourth Prime Minister at the Istana, in Singapore, on Wednesday. — Reuters

Mid-life crisis: from confusion to clarity



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

Life is a journey marked by various stages and one of the most tumultuous periods is the infamous mid-life crisis. This phase, typically occurring between the ages of 40 and 60, is characterised by a profound sense of disorientation and angst about the future. It's a time when we struggle with our identity and our self-confidence gets rattled. Along with the feelings of dread that the best days are behind us, the anxious thoughts of regret and nostalgia bring up sentiments of scarcity, which can move us towards isolation. However, amidst this temporary chaos lies the potential for profound personal growth and self-discovery — as long as we shift our perspective from the cyclone of confusion to clear-headed clarity. At the onset of a mid-life crisis, we might find ourselves grappling with existential questions about our purpose, direction and meaning in life. The routines that once provided comfort and stability may suddenly feel suffocating, while long-suppressed dreams and aspirations begin to resurface. This internal upheaval can manifest

externally through impulsive behaviour such as changing careers, buying super cars, booking in plastic surgery sessions or even engaging in extramarital affairs. Lamenting the passage of time, and the realisation that certain opportunities are no longer within reach, can be both a source of pain and more importantly the catalyst for change. Through confronting our deepest fears and insecurities, we are forced to face our shadows and ponder on the status of our life – being in denial will further exacerbate the confusion. This unnerving process of introspection can however be incredibly liberating, prompting the reassessment of our priorities and redefinition of our goals. By shedding the obligations imposed by societal demands, cultural norms and family expectations, we can finally embrace our authentic selves and live with extended hope for the future. When clarity emerges and we make peace with our past, focusing on the present moment will become easier. Mid-life crises serve as a wake-up call to cultivate

BY SHEDDING THE OBLIGATIONS IMPOSED BY SOCIETAL DEMANDS, CULTURAL NORMS AND FAMILY EXPECTATIONS, WE CAN FINALLY EMBRACE OUR AUTHENTIC SELVES AND LIVE WITH EXTENDED HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

deeper connections with loved ones, including ourselves. A perfect time to reconcile with estranged family members, strengthen bonds with friends and invest more time into nurturing partnerships. Re-evaluating the relationships that no longer serve us and exploring new interests are fundamental to accepting and embracing the new phase of this beautiful, unpredictable journey of life. Moving through a mid-life crisis can be challenging and it is possible to navigate this turbulent period with grace and resilience. Ultimately, the voyage through this unavoidable phase of life is not about recapturing our lost youth or avoiding the inevitability of aging. On the contrary, it is an opportunity for profound transformation and renewal. By facing the existential questions that arise during this period, we can emerge with a newfound sense of peace and purpose. The sooner we alter our relationship with the midway of life being a crisis and instead view the confusion as a gateway towards clarity, our perspective will undoubtedly shift into a more optimistic tone and thus we shall enter this new phase of life with positive intention and conviction.

Scion PM modernised Singapore, left own imprint on city state

MARTIN ABBUGAO

Under Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore has held its own in an era of globalised finance and cutting-edge tech, while continuing his venerated father's policy of muzzling free media and snuffing out dissent. The premier stepped down on Wednesday, passing the baton to his deputy Lawrence Wong, the second non-member of the Lee family to lead the wealthy Asian nation. As the son of the country's founding leader Lee Kuan Yew, Lee had to live with the perception that he could not have become prime minister without his pedigree. But after nearly two decades at the helm, steering Singapore through a global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic while diversifying its economy, he has left his own imprint on the city-state. Lee was sworn in as the nation's third prime minister on August 12, 2004 at age 52. He has presided over efforts to retool the city-state's export-driven economy by focusing on advanced industries such as biotechnology and electronics, as well as financial services. Lee Hsien Loong was born on February 10, 1952, to lawyers Lee Kuan Yew and Kwa Geok Choo, during a time of race riots, trade union militancy and rising communist influence in the British colony. His father was carving out a reputation as a steely leader in the rough and tumble of Singapore politics ahead of self-rule in 1959 — when he became prime minister — and eventual independence in 1965. He joined the Singapore Armed Forces in 1971 and graduated on a scholarship from Britain's Cambridge University in 1974 with first-class honours in mathematics and a diploma in computer science. When Cambridge's Trinity College offered him a fellowship to teach maths, he wrote to his tutor: "I must go home. I've joined the Singapore Armed Forces, my father's the PM and for me not to go home and do what I have to do would be bad for the country and for me." He became a brigadier-general, but left the military in 1984 to become an MP. Lee Kuan Yew stepped down in 1990 as part of a succession process worked out within the long-ruling People's Action Party (PAP), his son becoming deputy to successor Goh Chok Tong. Before ascending to the top job, Lee was chairman of the central bank, as well as finance minister. In his last major political speech as prime minister on May 1, Lee said he felt "a sense of satisfaction and completeness" as he hands over the top job. "I have done my duty, and I am very happy I chose this path of public service all those many years ago," he said. — AFP

Empowering progress: civic participation in the Arabian Gulf Cooperation Council



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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

In the middle of widening global frictions between a global north and global south, two of my least favourite terms, the Arabian Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) appears to be doing resilience and progress in the right way, where civic participation intertwines with socio-economic development. Oman and Kuwait stand out for their commitment not only to stability and investment promotion but also to fostering an environment where citizens actively engage in shaping their collective future. In this paradigm, progress is not just a top-down endeavour; it's a collaborative effort that empowers individuals and communities to play an active role in their societies. While some might argue that the recent May 2024 dissolution of Kuwait's National Assembly and suspension of a few articles of Kuwait's Constitution by the Emir of Kuwait as a setback for democracy, a deeper analysis will find it a courageous move to "restart" the social contract that has been ailing because of decades of back-and-forth vicious cycle of political stalemates. Empowering civic participation Oman and Kuwait have recognised the intrinsic value of empowering their citizens to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, without only relying on the traditional structures such as parliaments. From directly engaging citizens through grassroots initiatives to national dialogues, these two AGCC nations have instituted mechanisms that promote inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. Whether through town hall meetings, digital platforms, or community forums, citizens are encouraged to voice their opinions, contribute ideas, and hold their leaders accountable. Population growth and diversity The population growth in Oman and Kuwait isn't just numerical; it's a reflection of the diverse tapestry of cultures, ideas, and perspectives that enrich these societies. As populations expand, so does the pool of talent, creativity, and innovation. According to

World Bank data, Oman's population grew from approximately 2.4 million in 2000 to over 5.1 million in 2024, while Kuwait's population surged from around 2.2 million in 2000 to over 4.3 million in 2024. This diversity is not merely a demographic phenomenon; it's an asset that fuels progress and fosters resilience. What is remarkable about demographic policies in the AGCC, is their responsiveness to linking their national economic plans to attracting global talents, and their focus on preparing their younger generations for future roles and responsibilities.

Economic growth and opportunities

BY ENABLING THEIR CITIZENS, EMBRACING DIVERSITY, FOSTERING ECONOMIC GROWTH, INVESTING IN CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENGAGING IN INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS, KUWAIT AND OMAN PAVE THE WAY FOR INCLUSIVE, RESILIENT AND PROSPEROUS SOCIETIES

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates of Oman and Kuwait attest to their economic resilience and potential. Despite global challenges, both countries have maintained positive GDP growth rates, creating opportunities for job creation, entrepreneurship and prosperity. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Oman's GDP growth rate averaged around 5 per cent from 2010 to 2019, while Kuwait's GDP growth remained robust, averaging approximately 2.5 per cent during the same period. This economic growth isn't just about numbers; it's about expanding horizons, unlocking potentials, and building brighter futures for all. Investment in civic infrastructure As Oman and Kuwait embark on ambitious plans for economic

diversification and sustainable development, they recognise the critical importance of investing in civic infrastructure. From educational institutions to cultural centres, parks, and public spaces, these nations prioritise initiatives that nurture informed, engaged and empowered citizens. By fostering a culture of lifelong learning and civic engagement, they lay the groundwork for resilient, inclusive and dynamic societies. International collaborations The AGCC's commitment to progress and Net-Zero carbon emissions by 2050 extends beyond borders, as evidenced by international collaborations and exchanges. Projects like OQ8, a \$9-billion joint venture between OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International-KPI, in Duqm exemplify a post-Covid 19 economic resilience story, and the power of cooperation in driving socio-economic development. Environmental stewardship In the pursuit of progress, Oman and Kuwait are also mindful of their environmental responsibilities. Both nations have invested in renewable energy projects and implemented policies aimed at preserving natural resources and mitigating the impacts of climate change. By prioritising environmental sustainability, they ensure that progress isn't achieved at the expense of future generations but rather in harmony with the planet's ecological balance. In conclusion, global conflicts sparked deep discussions about how can we build forward better, and the limitations of one-size-fits-all democracy. Oman and Kuwait stand as examples of progress and civic participation in the Arabian Gulf Cooperation Council. By enabling their citizens, embracing diversity, fostering economic growth, investing in civic infrastructure and engaging in international collaborations, they pave the way for inclusive, resilient and prosperous societies. In this narrative, progress is not just a destination; it is a journey that invites everyone to participate, contribute and thrive.

Imagine Bangkok ‘under water’

Thailand may have to consider relocating its capital Bangkok because of rising sea levels, a senior official in the country’s climate change office said on Wednesday.

Projections consistently show that low-lying Bangkok risks being inundated by the ocean before the end of the century.

Much of the bustling capital already battles flooding during the rainy season.

Pavich Kesavawong, deputy director-general of the government’s department of climate change and environment, warned that the city might not be able to adapt with the world on its current warming pathway.

“I think we are beyond the 1.5 (degrees Celsius) already,” he said, referring to the increase in global temperatures from pre-industrial levels.

“Now we have to come back and think about adaptation.”

“I imagine Bangkok will be under water already, if we stay in our (current) circumstance.”

Bangkok’s city government is exploring measures that include building dikes, along the lines of those used in the Netherlands, he said.

But “we’ve been thinking about moving,” Pavich said, noting that the discussions were still hypothetical and the issue was “very complex.”

“Personally I think it’s a good choice, so we can separate the capital, the government areas and business areas,” he said.

“Bangkok (would) still be the government capital, but move the business.”

While a move is still a long way from being adopted as policy, it would not be unprecedented in the region.

Indonesia will inaugurate this year its new capital Nusantara, which will replace sinking and polluted Jakarta as the country’s political centre.

The mammoth move has been controversial and extremely expensive, with an estimated price tag of \$32-\$35 billion.

Thailand is suffering the effects of climate change across a range of sectors,



Sara HUSSEIN

The writer is based in Bangkok, covers climate change, environment and science across Asia as AFP’s first Future of the Planet reporter

THAILAND IS SUFFERING THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ACROSS A RANGE OF SECTORS, FROM FARMERS STRUGGLING WITH HEAT AND DROUGHT TO TOURISM BUSINESSES AFFECTED BY CORAL BLEACHING AND POLLUTION

from farmers struggling with heat and drought to tourism businesses affected by coral bleaching and pollution.

It has closed several national parks in response to recent coral bleaching and Pavich said further closures were possible.

“We have to save our nature, so we think that we will do any measure to protect our resources,” he said.

However, Pavich acknowledged that government efforts to tackle the growing problem of air pollution, particularly in Thailand’s north, had yet to bear fruit.

Legislation focused on clean air passed this year and Pavich said national parks officials had stepped up efforts to prevent and put out fires in protected areas.

“The agriculture sector is very challenging for us,” he said, referring to continued post-harvest burning that is a major contributor to seasonal haze. An improvement is not likely for several years.

More immediately, his department — part of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment — is pushing Thailand’s first climate change legislation, which has been in the works since at least 2019 but was shelved during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pavich said the legislation, which includes provisions on everything from carbon pricing to mitigation and adaptation measures, is likely to pass into law this year.

Thailand is targeting carbon neutrality by 2050, and net-zero by 2065.

Record-breaking heat last month that prompted governments in Asia to close schools offers fresh evidence of how climate change is threatening the education of millions of children.

The arrival of seasonal rains has now brought relief to some parts of the region, but experts warn the broader problem remains, and many countries are poorly prepared to handle the impacts of climate change on schooling.

Asia is warming faster than the global average, and climate change is producing more frequent, longer, and more intense heatwaves.

NO PLACE TO HIDE!



A woman carries a rug in an area housing displaced Palestinians in Deir el Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Wednesday amid the ongoing conflict. – AFP

Islamic finance for sustainable infrastructure

Today’s world is confronting a host of complex development challenges, from climate change and rapid urbanisation to widening inequality, debt sustainability, and a persistent digital divide. But, as the Covid-19 pandemic made plain, many developing countries lack the sustainable and resilient social-sector infrastructure required to address such complex and overlapping crises.

More worryingly, these countries — particularly the least-developed among them — are unable to close their infrastructure gaps, owing to shrinking fiscal space, heavy debt burdens and inadequate levels of official development aid.

By 2040, the global infrastructure-financing gap will have widened to an estimated \$15 trillion — a massive shortfall that can be attributed to a few key factors. Many developing countries simply do not have the financial resources for expensive and time-consuming large-scale infrastructure projects.

And private actors often shy away, owing to the perceived high risks of investing in infrastructure projects in developing countries. Together, these factors pose a significant obstacle to building desperately needed infrastructure.

The good news is that multilateral development banks (MDBs) and other stakeholders are increasingly aware of the need for swift action to overcome these challenges. MDBs are under pressure from their shareholders to



Muhammad Al Jasser

The writer is President of the Islamic Development Bank

ASSET-BASED AND RISK-SHARING INSTRUMENTS — THE BACKBONE OF ISLAMIC FINANCE — ENSURE THAT FINANCIERS BECOME STAKEHOLDERS IN A PROJECT’S SUCCESS

become better, bigger, and more effective.

An independent review of MDBs’ capital-adequacy frameworks — an important initiative commissioned by the G20 — recommended the expanded use of innovative finance.

More recently, the G20 Independent Expert Group on strengthening MDBs released a multi-volume report that, among other things, calls for increasing private-sector engagement in development finance by broadening existing risk-sharing instruments and pioneering new ones such as asset-based vehicles.

Asset-based and risk-sharing finance could be transformative, because, unlike the conventional way of raising funds through debt, these models have the added benefit of forging partnerships and fostering a collaborative environment.

Financiers become stakeholders, meaning that both parties have skin in the game and a vested interest in the project’s long-term viability and sustainability.

This mitigates the risk of moral hazard often associated with debt-based models.

These principles form the foundation of Islamic finance, although its participatory nature extends beyond sharing risk, as it focuses on long-term partnerships and encourages a commitment to the social and environmental

sustainability of a project throughout its lifecycle.

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), of which I am president, embodies this approach. Over the past 50 years, we have approved more than \$182 billion in funding for development projects related to renewable energy, the social sector, and — given our recent focus on driving green economic growth and developing human capital — sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

Islamic financial markets, valued at \$3.25 trillion and with ample liquidity and appetite for asset-based and risk-sharing bankable projects, could thus be a powerful tool for mobilising infrastructure



By 2040, the global infrastructure-financing gap will have widened to an estimated \$15 trillion.

investments in developing countries.

In particular, a hybrid financing model that makes use of both conventional and Islamic finance could scale up investment in infrastructure projects.

The IsDB has a proven track record of success in co-funding infrastructure projects with other MDBs and the private sector.

Completed projects include Dakar’s Blaise Diagne International Airport (with the African Development Bank) and Jordan’s Queen Alia International Airport (with the International Finance Corporation).

Infrastructure financing mobilised through asset-based and

risk-sharing financial instruments requires a well-developed and robust financial sector with strong legal and regulatory frameworks capable of protecting investors; robust domestic capital markets; and transparent monitoring and impact reporting.

That is where MDBs come in. They can help develop and strengthen the financial infrastructure needed to attract private capital to developing countries.

Moreover, MDBs could boost investor confidence and help create a pipeline of bankable projects by taking collective action.

The Global Collaborative Co-Financing Platform, recently launched by ten MDBs (including IsDB) and headed by the World Bank, is a step in the right direction.

Investing in sustainable and resilient infrastructure can mitigate the effects of climate change, yield long-term economic benefits, and improve people’s quality of life.

But raising the necessary capital will require harnessing the potential of asset-based and risk-sharing finance.

The IsDB is committed to playing a leading role in such efforts, but other MDBs and private investors must also embrace this approach. Only by working together to close the global infrastructure-finance gap can we build a more equitable future for all.

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sport

Omani pro wrestler **ANAS AL RIYAMI** during a bout in Qatar.

PIONEERING OMANI PRO WRESTLER AIMS TO CONQUER NEW HORIZONS

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Anas al Riyami, a pioneering young Omani professional wrestler, is all thrilled as he makes his first appearance this Saturday in Dubai in a World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) bout.

The event is under Dubai Sports Council and Anas is among 13 wrestlers who are selected for the show under Wrestlefest DXB company on May 18.

Wrestlers from host nation United Arab Emirates, India, Pakistan, Sweden, Lebanon, Philippines, Qatar, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are attending the show with Al Riyami being the lone Omani in the field.

"I started wrestling ever since I was a kid in the backyard after watching it on the screens with my dad. I felt that there is something more than its

'acting' where it's a combination of sports and entertainment that draws a lot of money around the world," the 21-year-old from Barka told Oman Daily Observer.

"I started looking out to where I can find the nearest wrestling academy in the Middle East and saw QPW Academy, which is Qatar Pro Wrestling Academy in Qatar and they invited me to attend the classes after they watched some of my backyard wrestling stuff I posted online. I took my classes and eventually became the first ever Omani professional wrestler," Anas explained his evolution as a professional wrestler.

"Now I'm getting booked in Qatar and I will make my first appearance this Saturday in Dubai under the company Wrestlefest DXB."

The youngster said that becoming a professional wrestler requires several attributes in the person.

"Becoming a professional wrestler

requires a blend of physical, technical, and personal attributes. Although it's predetermined, wrestlers need excellent strength, agility and stamina. This includes rigorous strength training, cardiovascular conditioning, and flexibility exercises."

FORMAL TRAINING
He says formal training is very important.

"Formal training at a reputable wrestling school is crucial. This includes learning basic moves, holds, bumps, and in-ring psychology and including strikes, throws, and submission holds are essential. Understanding how to perform moves safely for both the performer and the opponent is critical."

And, personal skills are also required to captivate the audience.

"Wrestlers must be able to engage the audience through their personality and mic skills. Developing

a strong character and being able to deliver compelling promos is vital. Understanding how to tell a story through a match, pacing, and the importance of selling moves is key to a successful wrestling career," Anas explained.

The Omani believes that building a network within the wrestling industry and maintaining a strong social media presence can help with career opportunities and fan engagement.

"My goal is to establish myself as a prominent Omani professional wrestler, showcasing the talent and potential of Omani youth on the global stage. I aspire to captivate audiences worldwide and demonstrate that with passion, hard work, and dedication, no dream is unattainable. Through my journey, I aim to send a powerful message that nothing is impossible, inspiring others to pursue their dreams relentlessly."

Anas said he is dedicated to boost the entertainment sport in Oman.

"I am dedicated to fostering the growth of professional wrestling in Oman, creating a vibrant and supportive community for enthusiasts and aspiring wrestlers alike. By establishing training programmes, organising local events, and collaborating with regional and international wrestling organisations, I aim to provide opportunities for talent development and exposure.

My vision is to build a robust infrastructure that nurtures passion and skill, allowing individuals to pursue their dreams within a well-supported and professionally guided environment. Through these efforts, I seek to not only elevate the sport within our region but also to inspire and empower a new generation of Omani wrestlers to achieve greatness on the global stage just like how I did," he signed off.



Delhi Capitals' Abishek Porel plays a shot against Lucknow Super Giants.

STUBBS, POREL KEEP DELHI'S PLAY-OFF HOPES ALIVE

NEW DELHI: Fiery fifties from Abishek Porel and Tristan Stubbs helped Delhi Capitals sign off their IPL league phase on a high as they beat Lucknow Super Giants by 19 runs on Tuesday.

The win took Delhi to 14 points in 14 matches and they remain technically in the mix to reach the play-offs of the T20 tournament, but a run-rate in the negative keeps their chances slim.

"We are still in contention even after the last game," Delhi skipper Rishabh Pant said after he returned to lead the side following a one-match ban for slow over-rate.

"We had a better chance of qualifying if I would have had a chance to play in the last game (which Delhi lost)."

The left-handed Porel hit 58 before Stubbs smashed an

unbeaten 57 off 25 balls to steer Delhi to 208-4 after being invited to bat first at their high-scoring home venue, Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Pant, a left-handed wicketkeeper-batsman, made 33 to cap off an impressive season after he came back in the IPL from a horror car crash in December 2022.

"Personally, it was fantastic to come back," said Pant, who has been picked in India's squad for the T20 World Cup next month.

"It was heartening to see the support from entire India. Was a long time to wait after one-and-a-half years. I want to be on the field all the time. Don't want to miss any action."

KL Rahul-led Lucknow have 12 points with one more match to play and have their hopes



Ishant Sharma celebrates a wicket with Tristan Stubbs (R) and Delhi teammates.

hanging by a thread.

The result confirmed a play-off spot for Rajasthan Royals, who became the second team to enter the final four alongside table-toppers Kolkata Knight Riders.

The top four teams make the

play-offs. The final is on May 26 in Chennai.

ISHANT RATTLES LUCKNOW

Ishant Sharma led the bowling charge with three early wickets as Delhi restricted Lucknow to

189-9 despite valiant knocks from Nicholas Pooran, who smashed 61, and Arshad Khan, who hit an unbeaten 58.

Delhi lost attacking opener Jake Fraser-McGurk for a duck but Porel and Shai Hope, who struck 38, put on 92 runs to lay the foundations of the big total.

Delhi stuttered in the middle after they lost Porel, Hope and then Pant at regular intervals and Lucknow bowlers checked the flow of runs. But Stubbs had other ideas and he hit back with a flurry of fours and sixes to fire Delhi past the 200 as the last three overs cost Lucknow 45 runs.

Lucknow suffered early blows after pace spearhead Ishant took down Rahul, for five, and Quinton de Kock, for 12, inside three overs.

Marcus Stoinis was stumped

by Pant off spinner Axar Patel and Ishant, who was named man of the match, struck again to make Lucknow slip to 44-4.

Stubbs made it count with his off-spin as he sent back impact substitute Ayush Badoni out for six to end a 27-run partnership with Pooran.

The left-handed Pooran attempted to drive the chase in his 27-ball knock laced with six fours and four sixes but he left a lot to be done when he departed in the 12th over.

Number eight Arshad then raised hopes of a turnaround with his late charge as he raised his first T20 50 in 25 balls to give Delhi a scare.

Arshad kept losing partners as he continued the charge but in the end failed to match up the asking-rate. — **AFP**

Outsider Tabilo storms into Rome semis

ROME: Alejandro Tabilo hailed the best tennis of his career on Wednesday after his fairytale run at the Rome Open continued to the semifinals with a straight-set win over China's Zhang Zhizhen.

Chile's Tabilo will play his first-ever last four match at a Masters 1000 event at the age of 26, after unfussily seeing off unseeded Zhang 6-3, 6-4 in one hour and 26 minutes on centre court at the Foro Italico.

Tabilo knocked out six-time Rome champion Novak Djokovic on Sunday and in the last four the 29th seed will face either world number five Alexander Zverev or Taylor Fritz who play the day's final match.

"It's just unbelievable, I just can't believe it right now, still trying to soak this in... Definitely an unforgettable two weeks for me," said a delighted Tabilo.

"It's definitely the best tennis of my life right now, but I mean, because inside I'm just so nervous, every time trying to close out the match gets a little bit tighter."

Tabilo, in fact, had far less trouble on Wednesday than he did in his battle with Karen



Chile's Alejandro Tabilo plays a return to China's Zhang Zhizhen during the ATP Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome. — **AFP**

Khachanov in the previous round, not facing a single break point on his way to the biggest match of his career at the last major tournament before the French Open.

Zverev, who won the Rome title in 2017, is the highest ranked man left in the event after Daniil Medvedev's elimination on Tuesday.

As well as Djokovic's exit, Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz both dropped out injured before the tournament.

Holger Rune, who lost last year's final to Medvedev, Madrid

champion Andrey Rublev — ranked sixth in the world — and beaten finalist Felix Auger-Aliassime have also been eliminated.

SABALENKA STROLLS

Women's second seed Sabalenka needed just an hour and 13 minutes to see off Jelena Ostapenko in straight sets, 6-2, 6-4 on her way to the semis, improving her record against her Latvian opponent to three wins and no defeats.

Crowd favourite Sabalenka will take on next the winner of two-time Australian Open champion

Victoria Azarenka and Danielle Collins, this year's Miami Open winner, who face off later on centre court.

"With this amazing atmosphere and with this amazing support... that's why I'm super motivated here and that's why I always say that this is the dream tournament for me to win," said Sabalenka.

"I really enjoy playing here so I don't have to think about being focused... I'm just here enjoying it and doing everything I can to win every point I play no matter what the score. I guess that's the key."

The 26-year-old could get a rematch of the Madrid final which she lost in dramatic fashion to world number one Iga Swiatek earlier this month.

Sabalenka, who has won the two most recent Australian Opens, was in a different class to Ostapenko, a former French Open winner, who could do nothing in the face of some punishing hitting.

Rome is the first time since the 2013 French Open that the top three women have reached the last four of a WTA event of 250 level or higher, with Swiatek and world number three Coco Gauff in the other semifinal. — **AFP**

10th edition of women's volleyball tourney on June 7

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Oman Expatriate Volleyball Association is gearing up for their 10th edition of women's tournament on June 7.

Medals and prize money are on offer for top places in the open volleyball tournament to be held at the Strike Sports Centre near Oman Automobile Association from 9 am to 6 pm.

The 2024 edition will see 16 teams in action for the top honours in the one-day tournament.

The 10th anniversary edition is planned to be a special one, said Khalid al Balushi, chief organiser of the tournament and founder of Oman Expatriates Volleyball Association.

"The Oman Expatriate Volleyball Association has come a long way. We started in 2014 with six teams at the outdoor courts in Al Ghubra lake park. From 2016, we started indoor matches," Khalid said.

"Now we have more than 20 expatriate volleyball teams playing in Muscat. We (Oman Expatriate Volleyball

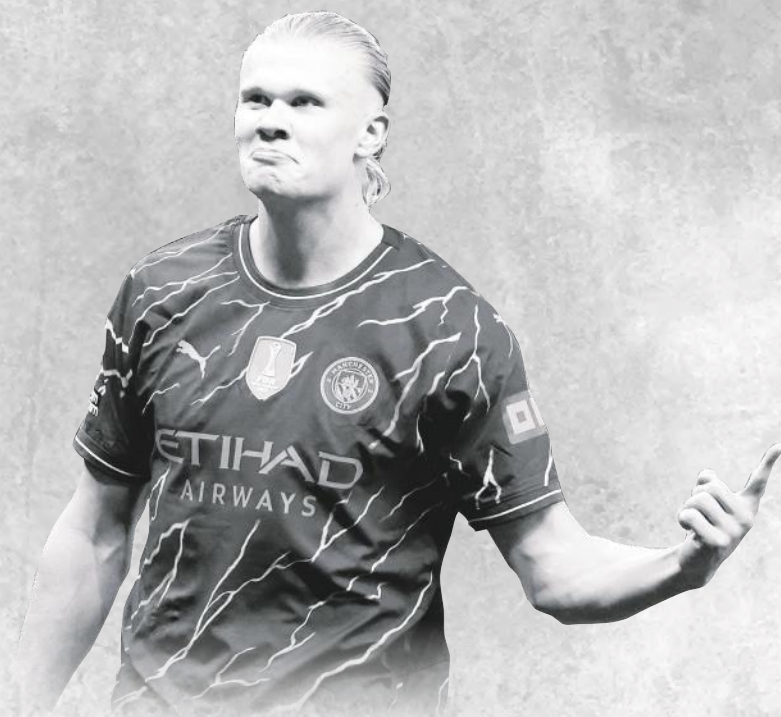


Association) are the first organisation who started volleyball in Muscat for expatriates."

"At present, we have almost 400 to 500 expatriates playing and participating in our sports activity," Khalid added.

A significant number of Omani women players make their presence in the different teams, he said.

"Several local women players are in the participating teams and this gives good boost to the local women's volleyball too," Khalid concluded.



H A A L A N D

DOUBLE

PUTS MAN CITY
ON BRINK OF
PREMIER LEAGUE
HISTORY



LONDON: Erling Haaland scored twice to settle Manchester City's nerves as the Premier League champions beat Tottenham 2-0 to take a giant step towards a historic fourth straight English title on Tuesday.

The Norwegian forward tapped home a pinpoint Kevin De Bruyne cross early in the second half to score City's first-ever league goal at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

And he netted a late penalty to seal the three points for the visitors, minutes after substitute goalkeeper Stefan Ortega saved brilliantly from Son Heung-min.

The win takes Pep Guardiola's team two points clear of Arsenal at the top of the table after 37 games.

Victory at the Etihad against West Ham on Sunday will make them champions for a fourth consecutive season, regardless of the Gunners' result against Everton. No team in English top-flight history has ever won four titles in a row.

Defeat for Spurs also guarantees that Aston Villa will finish in the fourth Champions League spot,

joining City, Arsenal and Liverpool in Europe's top-tier competition next season.

"We gave the chance in our hands for the last game," Guardiola told the BBC. "The tennis players say 'The serve to win Wimbledon, the last game, is the most difficult one'.

"It happened in our period against Aston Villa (in 2022). And many, many years ago it happened with Sergio Aguero (scoring) in 93 minutes 20 seconds against QPR. So there will be the typical game."

Guardiola called for help from City's fans to get them over the line.

"We know what we're playing for," he said. "The tension is there, the rival is so good. It's why it is difficult, we know that.

"Everyone come to the stadium and make noise. These games are more difficult but you have to do it. We'll have one day off, two days to prepare, and then we will do our best."

'STAND UP IF YOU HATE ARSENAL'

The build-up to the game in north London was dominated by a fierce debate over whether home fans wanted their own team to lose in order to leave City in the driving seat, with Arsenal their nearest challengers.

The Spurs supporters made their feelings towards their bitter local rivals clear in the opening minutes, with chants of "Stand up if you hate Arsenal" ringing around the stadium.

Tottenham had the first sight of goal, with City's Ederson tipping over a fierce Rodrigo Bentancur effort before Spurs goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario kept out Phil Foden's close-range shot.

City, who came into the match unbeaten in 21 league matches, were short of their fluent best while Spurs struggled to put the finishing touches to their attacking moves.

Moments after the re-start Vicario dived full length to keep out a stinging De Bruyne effort.

But the visitors broke the

deadlock in the 51st minute when Bernardo Silva found De Bruyne in the box and the Belgian crossed for Haaland to slot home from point-blank range.

Thousands of Spurs fans chanted "Are you watching Arsenal" as the City faithful celebrated in their corner.

The game then became disjointed as De Bruyne was raked down the Achilles by Pape Sarr before Ederson took a blow to the head in denying Cristian Romero and was replaced shortly afterwards by Ortega.

The German was called into action immediately, denying substitute Dejan Kulusevski from close range.

Time stood still when Son burst through with five minutes of normal time remaining but Ortega saved with his legs when the South Korean seemed certain to score.

Guardiola fell to the ground, clutching his head in disbelief. Instead City were awarded a penalty when Pedro Porro brought down substitute Jeremy Doku and Haaland smashed home in the 91st minute to spark wild celebrations. — AFP

Manchester City's Erling Braut Haaland celebrates scoring their second goal.
— Reuters

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PDO invests \$2.5 billion towards In-Country Value initiatives



PDO signs Memorandum of Collaboration with key government and private entities to develop the ICV enabling ecosystem initiative in Oman.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the country's largest producer of oil and gas, stands out as a beacon of commitment to promoting In-Country Value (ICV) in the Sultanate of Oman.

In 2023, PDO made a significant investment of \$2.5 billion towards ICV initiatives, representing a substantial 40% of its total supply chain expenditure.

This substantial investment was strategically allocated across various sectors to maximise its impact on the local economy.

One of the key focuses of PDO's ICV programme in 2023 was supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Oman. An impressive \$900 million was earmarked for SMEs, reflecting PDO's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and supporting local businesses.

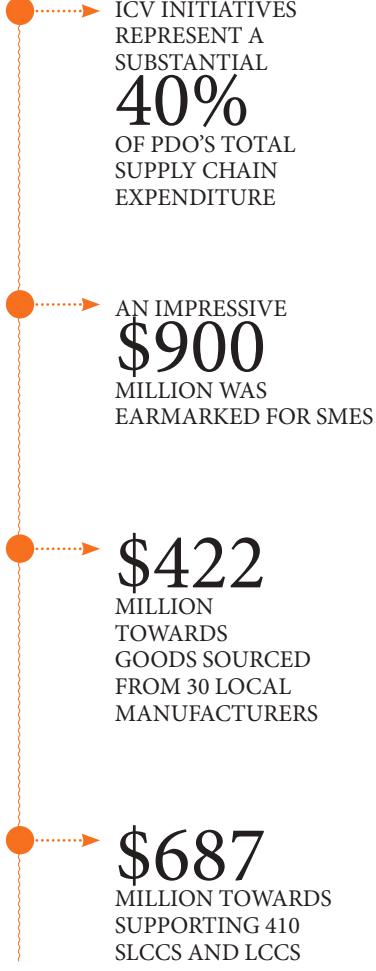
Furthermore, PDO directed \$422 million towards goods sourced from 30 local manufacturers.

By prioritising local procurement, PDO contributes to the growth and sustainability of Omani industries, ensuring a vibrant and competitive market for domestic manufacturers.

This approach not only enhances the resilience of local supply chains but also strengthens the overall economic landscape of Oman.

In its quest to empower communities and promote inclusive growth, PDO allocated \$687 million towards supporting 410 Super Local Community Contractors (SLCCs) and Local Community Contractors (LCCs).

By engaging with these local contractors, PDO not only stimulates economic activity in various regions but also fosters a sense of ownership and pride among community members.



The efforts of PDO in driving ICV were celebrated during the bi-annual ICV Day, a testament to the company's dedication to elevating Oman's economic landscape.

The event, marking the 12th anniversary of the programme, was held at the JW Marriott Hotel under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

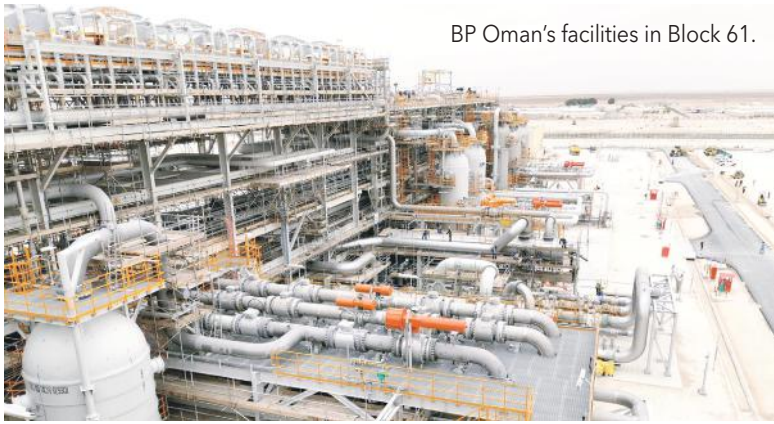
At the core of PDO's ICV strategy is a commitment to excellence and responsible business practices. The company's investments in goods, the workforce, infrastructure, and services reflect a holistic approach to value creation that goes beyond monetary figures.

By nurturing a culture of transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct, PDO sets a benchmark for corporate stewardship in Oman's business landscape.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, lauded PDO's efforts in enhancing ICV and its alignment with Oman Vision 2040. He emphasised the importance of PDO's contributions to economic diversification, entrepreneurship, and industry development within the Sultanate of Oman.

PDO's holistic approach to ICV encompasses legislative, regulatory, and executive dimensions, reflecting a comprehensive strategy for sustainable growth.

In addition to its financial investments, PDO places a strong emphasis on community partnerships and capacity building.



BP Oman's facilities in Block 61.

BP Oman's green hydrogen project in concept development stage

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY15

Energy major BP says it is currently focused on assessing the solar and wind resources of a land block awarded by the Omani government last year for the development of green hydrogen.

Last June, BP Oman signed a project development and land use agreement with Hydrom — the orchestrator of Oman's green hydrogen sector — for a potential 150,000 tonnes a year green hydrogen project near Duqm in Oman's Al Wusta Governorate.

"The project is currently in the concept development stage, and we continue to progress our data collection campaign using LiDARs (light detection and ranging devices), solar stations and met masts," BP Oman stated in its newly published 2023 Socioeconomic Review 2023 of its Oman operations.

As part of its ambitions to develop its presence in Oman's green hydrogen sector, BP Oman also signed an MoU with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) for the potential allocation of land to develop green hydrogen derivatives within the Duqm SEZ.

Separately, it signed an MoU with Asyad Group — the state-

owned integrated shipping and logistics services provider — to jointly explore the development of the hydrogen sector in Oman.

Another MoU inked with local think-tank Oman Hydrogen Centre (OHC) focuses on green hydrogen and renewable energy education, upskilling, local capability development, and R&D.

"We aim to be a leader in hydrogen and rapidly scale up our presence worldwide. We plan to work with partners and governments to develop a hydrogen infrastructure network and support demand creation through market and supply chain development from BP's global operations," it further noted in its report.

In a foreword, Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, welcomed BP's role in renewable hydrogen development in Oman.

"BP's commitment to explore the potential for green hydrogen development in Duqm supports our hydrogen strategy to achieve a lower-carbon energy future. It has achieved this while prioritising the up-skilling of our local workforce and helping drive a competitive market through its in-country value efforts," he stated.

Al Hadhrami cited in particular BP's contribution to Oman's energy requirements, notably through the operation of Block 61 in central Oman. "Block 61's operations have been a major source of energy in Oman. BP and its partners continue to embed emission-reducing technologies as it extracts gas from the complex tight-gas reservoir," he added.

Production from Block 61, BP's flagship investment in Oman, averaged 1.5 billion cubic feet/day of natural gas in 2023, representing around 35% of the country's total gas requirement.

Preparatory work commences on Hafeet Rail project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Hafeet Rail has announced that preparatory work is commencing full speed ahead for the construction of the transformative railway link between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirate.

The announcement came during a site visit for key officials and members of the Asyad and Hafeet Rail executive management teams in addition to project contractors and consultants.

The visit which included introducing the key stops at the passengers, repairs and shipping stations as well as

key bridges and tunnels sites, underscored the venture's critical role in facilitating local and regional trade, unlocking new opportunities in infrastructure, transportation, and logistics sectors, fostering economic diversification and strengthening bi-lateral relations between the two nations.

In addition to providing a first-hand overview on the project, which will include the construction of 60 bridges, some towering up to 34 metres in height, and tunnels stretching 2.5 kilometres in length, the Hafeet Rail team presented the latest rail technologies along with



The announcement came during a site visit for key officials and members of the Asyad and Hafeet Rail executive management teams in addition to project contractors and consultants.

the innovative engineering and architectural solutions designed to overcome the challenging geographical terrain and weather conditions while ensuring the highest levels of efficiency and safety in accordance with international standards and best practice. The cutting-edge

rail network will not only serve as a catalyst for stimulating various industrial sectors and economic activities but will also significantly contribute to the tourism industry through the facilitation of easier and faster travel between the two countries.

Ahmed al Balushi, Asyad Group Chief Executive Asset Management, commended the engineers and architects of the Hafeet Rail team, whose ingenuity and precision are bringing this visionary project to execution, after various contracts were awarded last month coinciding with the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the

United Arab Emirates.

He expressed that the speed at which the project is progressing reflects the commitment of the two nations in advancing the wheel of development and reaping the multi-faceted rewards of the project as quickly as possible.

Al Balushi explained that investing in developing local capabilities and expertise in various disciplines related to the rail network over the last few years has enabled the project to successfully enter the implementation phase under the leadership of national talent with the highest levels of efficiency and professionalism.

TURN TO PAGE 15

MHD Automobiles receives Jetour global distributor award for best customer satisfaction

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles LLC, a leading automotive distributor, is proud to announce that it has been honoured with the Jetour Global Distributor Award for Best Customer Satisfaction in both Sales and After-sales categories.

This esteemed award recognises MHD Automobiles' unparalleled commitment to customer intimacy and satisfaction throughout the entire customer journey, from sales interactions to post-purchase service handling.

The award, bestowed by Jetour, a renowned global automotive brand, underscores MHD Automobiles' exceptional performance in customer relationship management, setting a benchmark for excellence among more than 50 Jetour overseas distributors.

"This award is a testament to our unwavering dedication to providing exceptional service and ensuring utmost customer satisfaction," said Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO at MHD Automobiles LLC.

He also remarked "We are incredibly honoured to receive this recognition, which reflects the hard work and dedication of our team in delivering an unparalleled customer experience. This award motivates us to strive for even higher standards and to exceed



customer expectations at every opportunity."

The Jetour Global Distributor Award for Best Customer Satisfaction is awarded annually and is based on rigorous criteria evaluating customer intimacy and satisfaction demonstrated by distributors.

MHD Automobiles' exemplary performance for the business year 2023 was celebrated during the Jetour Annual Global Distributor Conference, held in Beijing in April 2024.

MHD Automobiles LLC extends its gratitude to Jetour for this prestigious recognition and reaffirms its commitment to delivering exceptional service and fostering enduring customer relationships.

Lulu hands over cash prizes to 'Shop and Win' promotion winners

MUSCAT: Lulu Oman concluded its Ramadhan Shop and Win promotion by handing over RO 100,000 worth cash prizes to the winners of the campaign.

The Shop and Win promotion, which was held from February 15 to April 20 at all Lulu stores in Oman, gave customers a chance to win RO 100,000 worth cash prizes during the entire promotional period.

Customers who made purchases of at least RO 10 at any LuLu Hypermarket in Oman during the promotional period were eligible to enter e-raffle draws.

The cash prize included a grand prize of RO 10,000 and weekly cash prizes of RO 5,000, RO 750 , RO 500, RO 200 and RO 100. There were eight draws to select a total of 281 lucky winners throughout the period.

Sirajudheen was announced as the lucky winner of the Grand Prize of RO 10,000. Buthina Mohammed, Eman al Yaqoobi, Mohammed Paramban, Ahmed



About Ghodaia, Mohammed Shah Alam, Saalim Said, Gafoor Vengali and Hussain Aziz were the eight winners of the weekly cash prize of RO 5000 each. Other weekly cash prizes of RO 750 , RO 500, RO 200 and RO 100 were won by Lulu customers from all over Oman.

Ananth A V, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman & India, stated, "I would like to congratulate our lucky Grand Prize winner and all other winners of this year's Shop and Win promotion.

As part of Ramadhan and Eid, Lulu had offered a range of exciting deals and discounts to celebrate the festive occasion.

From discounted prices on groceries to special deals on clothing and household items, there were amazing deals and a variety of offers to help shoppers make the most of their holiday season."

Congratulating the winners, "Shabeer K A, Regional Director – Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, stated, "We are overwhelmed

by the response and the positive feedback generated by this campaign. This initiative was an opportunity for us to highlight our commitment towards our consumers, meet their everyday needs, as well as provide them with high-quality products at competitive prices.

Through this promotion, we were able to further enrich our customers' shopping experience and help them win exciting rewards that we offer during Ramadhan and Eid."

NBO Muzn's corporate banking services transform business efficiency

MUSCAT: Continuing its commitment to provide efficient Shari'a-compliant solutions, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking offers a comprehensive solution for businesses looking to optimise their financial operations through its Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) services.

Muzn's CIB platform offers a variety of features, including local and foreign remittances, a simple utility payments, a wage protection system, bulk payment functionality, and a maintenance fee. Designed to simplify business operations and streamline financial transactions, it underscores Muzn's dedication to supporting business growth and success in a competitive market.

Salima al Marzooqi, Assistant General Manager & Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Muzn, said:



"Muzn's Islamic Banking offers a secure, smart, and future-proof Corporate Internet Banking platform that allows companies to manage their financial transactions with ease and efficiency.

Our CIB platform is not just about convenience; it's also about providing significant benefits to corporate customers. The flexibility to pay utility bills, Public Authority for Social Insurance contributions, and through a single platform can save users time, reduce administrative effort

and manage their cash flows.

This platform supports businesses in reducing operational costs while enjoying modern and secure banking solutions."

Existing and potential corporate customers can now access Muzn's CIB platform when opening a Tijarah account, making it easier and more cost-effective for businesses to adopt Muzn's services. The Muzn Tijarah Account is designed for corporates, small and medium enterprises, and entrepreneurs, allowing them to earn returns on surplus cash kept in their bank accounts.

With added features such as the Wage Protection System for seamless salary payments, corporate entities can make monthly salary payments directly to their employees' accounts at any bank in Oman.

BankDhofar offers priority customers exclusive prizes for Olympic Games Paris 2024

MUSCAT: BankDhofar always seeks to enhance its customer banking experience by providing premium exclusive offers and rewards for a comprehensive and exceptional banking experience.

In this context, the bank has announced the launch of Olympic Games Paris 2024 Campaign, giving Al Riadah and Al Rifaa customers the opportunity to win exclusive packages to attend the Olympic Games Paris 2024 scheduled from July 26 to August 11, 2024.

The campaign will run till May 31, 024, and a draw will be conducted to announce 2 winners who will attend the Olympic Games Paris 2024.

Packages will include air tickets along with a companion, as well as luxurious hotel accommodation, city experience, and tickets to attend the event .

To qualify for the campaign, customers need to spend a minimum of RO 100 per month using the eligible BankDhofar Visa Credit Cards.

Each RO 100 spent locally gives the customers 1 chance. Commenting on this offer, Bilal Faiz Muhammad al Raiisi, AGM - Cards & Bancassurance said: "We seek to be always closer to our customers by participating with them in all events and occasions and providing premium offers and exceptional campaigns to meet their expectations and needs, giving them a comprehensive and exceptional banking experience that suits our Al Riadah and Al Rifaa customers."

"The exclusive outstanding offers provided to our customers around the year reflect our endeavours to offer them a combined banking experience integrated with our cutting-edge, innovative banking products, services and payment solutions," he added.

"BankDhofar credit cardholders get the chance to participate in the bank's campaigns all year round, in addition to enjoying a unique lifestyle through the various benefits offered by these cards," he emphasised.



Manish Gautam, Visa's Country Manager for Oman, said: "BankDhofar's Olympic Games Paris 2024 promotion is a great example of how our clients can leverage Visa's sponsorship to create exclusive, rewarding and memorable experiences for their Visa cardholders.

Given that the Olympics is one of the most watched sporting events globally, it's also a strategic move that can significantly promote the use of digital payments and support local businesses. We're proud to help bring value to BankDhofar's Visa cardholders, while also contributing to the Oman government's digital commerce agenda."

BankDhofar's Credit Cards offer the best payment method of convenience and benefits, including the Rewards Program, Entertainer App, etc... Additionally, Credit Cards provide a unique lifestyle, and eligibility for exceptional campaigns throughout the year, which are always well-received and popular among customers.

Co-creating a blueprint for innovative collaboration of 'New Era'

MUSCAT: Chery Beijing Auto Show and Global Dealer Conference was recently held in April, during which Chery's new development strategy, new technologies and new vehicle models were unveiled. The theme of this event was 'New Energy, New Eco, New Era'.

In the face of new challenges and a new environmental context in the global automotive industry, Chery Automobile has actively responded by adopting measures such as the Qpower powertrain architecture, the 4P+2P management model, and the development of an automotive ecosystem to show its unique competitiveness.

Chery has implemented sustainable development technology routes and decarbonisation solutions for the entire industry chain and the entire



life cycle, adhering to the concepts of "sustainability, innovation, family, and companionship" and an important strategic direction of "green and low carbon."

Through these strategies, the QPower brand has achieved lower

production energy consumption and showcased Chery's future vision of building a green ecosystem.

QPower represents the pinnacle of Chery's 26-year journey in powertrain technology,

evolving into a 4.0 comprehensive architecture that spans the full spectrum of energy types—ICE, PHEV, and BEV.

Chery Automobile is deeply committed to building a brand that resonates with users by

putting them at the heart of everything it does.

The Company actively seeks out and collaborates with global partners across research and development, production, and sales.

This collaborative spirit not only enriches Chery's offerings but also ensures that wherever you encounter the Chery brand, you're experiencing the pinnacle of what they stand for.

The construction of Chery's vehicle ecosystem is not just about optimising and upgrading individual products but rather about creating a complete and harmonious ecosystem from a deeper and broader perspective.

Initially, Chery places a strong emphasis on the aesthetic experience within its vehicle ecosystem.

It is deeply ingrained

in our understanding that automobiles transcend mere transportation utility, serving as artistic expressions that reflect individuality and refinement.

Thus, in the development of Chery's vehicle ecosystem, we are dedicated to crafting each vehicle as a sensory masterpiece.

Ranging from sleek exterior aesthetics to intricate interior detailing, from distinctive paint palettes to cutting-edge technological integrations, Chery impeccably showcases its relentless pursuit and profound comprehension of beauty.

Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders.

Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth.

Preparatory work commences on Hafeet Rail project

FROM PAGE 13

Eng Ahmed al Musawa al Hashemi, CEO of Hafeet Rail said, "The commencement of preparatory works for construction is a testament to the robust synergy between all concerned parties in both nations and has made this milestone possible in record time.

We are confidently laying down the right tracks thanks to the shareholders of Hafeet Rail and the expertise of a number of local companies in Oman and the UAE in addition to international partners."

He added, "During the site visit, we explored some of the most important sites where preparatory works are underway including Wadi Al Jizi where a 700-metre-long bridge towering 34 metres will be constructed. It is envisioned to be an architectural and engineering marvel in a complex geographical terrain. Greater collaboration will be required in the phases to come, and our focus remains steadfast on quality, safety and the environment in line with best international industry practices."

The project is the first-of-its-kind railway network that links two Gulf nations and presents a seismic shift in goods transportation methods across the region as it can handle substantial cargo volumes.

This dependable and efficient transportation option reduces dependency on road transport, which is often slower and less sustainable than rail.

Connecting five major ports and several industrial and free zones across both nations, Hafeet Rail promises a 40% reduction in shipping costs and a 50% reduction in transit times compared to traditional land transportation methods.

This shift not only decreases the reliance on road transport by cars and trucks but also promotes more sustainable shipping practices.

The establishment of the railway network will also unlock substantial opportunities for SMEs in construction, engineering, and logistics support, serving as a catalyst for economic growth and innovation within the domestic economy.

By linking major ports along the route, the Hafeet Rail project offers local SMEs to import, export, and distribute their products, amplifying their market reach and competitiveness in the global marketplace.

The Hafeet Rail project represents a revolutionary development in the GCC's logistics and transportation sectors. The enhanced connectivity, reduced transport times and costs, and the robust passenger services offered is set to redefine the region's economic landscape and competitiveness.

The project's impact will be felt across various sectors, promoting industrial growth, job creation, and increased opportunities for attracting national and foreign investments.

Adrak Developers inks pact to build Sultan Haitham City's Neighbourhood 12 D

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 15

Leading Omani real estate investment firm Adrak Developers LLC has announced a significant partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in the development of Neighbourhood 12 D (NH 12 D) within Sultan Haitham City.

The signing of the Development Agreement took place at the recent Oman Design & Build Exhibition 2024 held at the OCEC.

The project signifies a commitment to redefining luxury living in Muscat. NH 12 D will encompass over 300 high-end residential units spread across a land area of 56,166 square metres.

With an estimated investment value of RO 38.7 million, the development promises to be a landmark addition to Sultan Haitham City. The signing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

Dr Thomas Alexander, Chairman of Al Adrak Group of Companies, highlighted the company's vision for the project:



Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, with Dr Thomas Alexander, Chairman of Al Adrak Group of Companies, at the agreement signing ceremony.

"We at Adrak are honoured to partner with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on this transformative project. Neighbourhood 12 D embodies our vision for creating luxurious living spaces that elevate Muscat's residential landscape. We are confident this development will be a cornerstone of Sultan Haitham City and a testament to Oman's commitment to innovation and progress."

Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, emphasised the project's alignment with the Ministry's vision: "The Ministry is delighted to collaborate with Adrak Developers on Neighbourhood 12 D. This project aligns perfectly with our vision for Sultan Haitham City, fostering a vibrant community and offering residents a world-class living experience.

We are confident this

development will contribute significantly to Muscat's growth and prosperity."

Ryan Maxwell, Business Development Manager at Adrak Developers, stated: "We are thrilled to be a part of this exciting development. Neighbourhood 12 D represents a unique opportunity to redefine luxury living in Muscat. It's a privilege to work alongside such esteemed partners, and we are confident this project

will be a resounding success."

Following the signing of the development agreement for Neighbourhood 12 D, Adrak Developers entered into a partnership with MTDI, a globally acclaimed architectural and design group, as the master developer for this exciting project.

MTDI brings a wealth of experience and international recognition to the project. With a proven track record of designing award-winning spaces around the world, MTDI is renowned for its innovative approach, focus on sustainability, and commitment to creating places that foster human connection.

Marek, Group Founder and Design Lead, MTDI: "We are honoured to be selected by Adrak Developers for this transformative project. Neighbourhood 12 D presents a unique opportunity to design a vibrant and sustainable community that celebrates Omani culture and caters to the evolving needs of modern residents.

We are committed to working collaboratively with Adrak to create a legacy project that will enrich Sultan Haitham City for generations to come."

PDO invests \$2.5 billion towards In-Country Value initiatives

FROM PAGE 13

The company created 1,830 job opportunities for Omani engineers, planners, and technicians in 2023, underscoring its commitment to nurturing local talent and fostering skills development.

By launching 28 KAFAA training programmes benefiting 1,000 engineers, PDO not only invests in the present workforce but also in the future leaders of Oman's energy sector.

Dr Aflah al Hadhrami, PDO's Managing Director, emphasised the alignment of ICV initiatives with Oman Vision 2040 goals. These efforts not only enhance the energy sector's contribution to the GDP but also promote sustainability and support local communities.

Taking its commitment to excellence a step further, PDO introduced the first-ever Master's programme in Business Administration for ICV in collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University.

This pioneering initiative aims

to equip future leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to drive sustainable growth and innovation within the GCC region.

By investing in human capital development, PDO cements its legacy as a champion of knowledge and expertise in the energy sector.

Moreover, PDO's collaboration with KCA Deutag to inaugurate the first locally manufactured drilling rig in Oman symbolises the company's dedication to localisation and industry development.

By supporting local industries that cater to vital sectors such as oil and gas, PDO contributes to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of Oman's economy.

This milestone not only showcases the technical capabilities of local industries but also underscores the importance of fostering a self-reliant and resilient industrial base.

As the main highlight of ICV Day, PDO announced the winners of the ICV Awards,

recognising exceptional performance among its contractors.

The winners in various categories included Cameron Services Middle East LLC, Oman Fiber Optic SAOC, Al Haditha Petroleum Services, Dohat Al Khaleej LLC, and Rihai — Data Migration and Services LLC.

During ICV Day, PDO also signed a Memorandum of Collaboration with key government and private entities to develop the ICV enabling ecosystem initiative.

This collaborative effort aims to address the challenges faced by local companies interested in investing in ICV, providing access to demand, infrastructure, finance, technology, and a supportive legislative framework.

By strengthening relationships between the public and private sectors, PDO builds a foundation for sustainable growth and innovation within the Sultanate of Oman, fostering an ecosystem that nurtures innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development.

MELA honours distinguished leaders at annual Master Class

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Middle East Leadership Academy (MELA), a prominent non-profit leadership development network, has announced the winners of this year's Chairman's Excellence Awards. The awards were presented at MELA's annual Master Class held in King Abdullah Economic City, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Among the distinguished recipients is Mohammed al Tamami, Co-founder and Chief Commercial Officer of Mamun, a crowd financing platform supporting SMEs in Oman. Recognised for his innovative leadership and commitment to business growth, Mohammed exemplifies the calibre of leaders nurtured within the MELA network.

This year's event also honoured Amer al Fadhil, Managing Director of Competence HR, and Ibtihal Bawazir of Petroleum Development Oman, both of whom have made significant contributions to their industries and communities.

The rigorous 10-day Master Class serves as a collaborative platform for leaders to share insights, enhance skills, and expand their professional networks.

Amer al Rawas, Board Member of the MELA, expressed his pride in the achievements of the awardees, "The recognition of our alumni reflects the robust impact and strength of our network. Our awardees drive significant change and innovation, demonstrating exceptional leadership while contributing positively to their communities. We are proud to support and celebrate such outstanding individuals who represent the best in professional and personal excellence."



Key figures from the Middle East Leadership Academy felicitating the winners.

Development Bank participates in 47th ADFIAP Meeting

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Development Bank of the Sultanate Oman is participating in the 47th annual meeting of the Association of Development Financing Institutions in Asia and the Pacific (ADFIAP), which is under way in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from May 15, 2024.

The three-day forming brings together delegates from over 40 countries to explore development



finance strategies under the theme 'DFIs Role in Sustainable Finance Ecosystem: Cultivating a Climate-Smart and Sustainable Future.'

This year's event will focus on how development finance institutions can enhance their support for environmentally and socially responsible business practices. By fostering investment in greener technologies and businesses.

Hussain al Lawati, CEO, Development Bank, emphasised

the important role of the Phnom Penh event in supporting regional economies: "Our presence at ADFIAP meetings is crucial for promoting practices that support not only environmentally responsible financing but also economic resilience, particularly through our support of small and medium-sized enterprise."

Approximately 93 institutions, including ADFIAP members and stakeholders will participate in the event which will facilitate

discussions on innovative financing solutions for climate-smart projects.

Founded in 1976, ADFIAP plays a key role in shaping development policies and enhancing the operational competencies of its members to address regional development priorities.

Development Bank is committed to leveraging the insights gained from the annual meeting to further its initiatives in sustainable financing.

Is Oman considering introducing personal income tax?



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI.

Many citizens believe that the government's decision to impose an income tax on individuals is a new development.

However, the issue dates back to 2020, when it was first raised as part of the country's economic development plan for 2020-2024.

A decision to implement personal income tax was anticipated in 2022, at the height of the pandemic, but it was postponed. Now, there is renewed talk of imminent action, with plans to implement the new tax at the beginning of 2025.

Any government decision has positive or negative consequences

on people's lives, particularly concerning business, employment and personal finances. This is especially critical as the government is trying to attract more foreign investments by offering favourable investment conditions, which would be undermined by high taxes.

The issue of taxes is connected to the external debt that Oman has faced in recent years. This prompted the adoption of a financial balance plan to reduce the annual deficit and continue repaying external debt, which was RO 21.7 billion (\$56.4 billion) in 2021 and has since decreased to RO 15.1 billion (\$39 billion) according to the latest figures. This reduction has led to an improved

credit rating and a more positive future outlook for the country.

The government is exploring alternatives to correct financial conditions and continue providing services.

The key question is how much revenue the government can generate from imposing an income tax on individuals in a region known for its fierce competition in attracting foreign investments and offering many free services.

This move would be unprecedented in the region, at a time when the country's credit rating is improving and both public and private institutions are better positioned to attract more foreign investments, particularly

with the rise in oil prices and increased daily oil production.

Oman's medium-term financial plan since 2020 has successfully reduced public debt, diversified national income sources, stimulated economic growth, provided more jobs for Omanis, and implemented various developmental projects. Imposing an income tax on individuals could disrupt this plan and its objectives.

The potential harm to the national economy suggests that it would be wise to thoroughly discuss all aspects of this policy before implementation.

Many merchants and wealthy individuals in Oman already pay annual Zakat according to Islamic

law.

However, the primary concern lies in the risk of global oil prices declining below expectations, which could push the government to consider alternatives, including imposing an income tax on individuals.

If Oman decides to implement an income tax on individuals, it will be the first Gulf country to do so.

Several Gulf countries have recently announced their intention to impose this tax to enhance the economic environment and investment opportunities. Oman must consider these factors to remain competitive with other countries in the region.

Oman's new economic horizon: Charting a course for diversification and development



HUSSAIN AL YAFAI

The writer is CEO of Standard Chartered Oman

Oman stands at a pivotal juncture in its economic history. As the global economy grapples with the challenges of inflation, oil price volatility, and a general downturn, the Sultanate of Oman has set its sights on a bold new vision for the future.

Launched in 2020, Oman Vision 2040, the country's ambitious roadmap for economic and social development, aims to steer the nation towards a more diversified, sustainable and resilient economy.

This vision represents a critical shift in Oman's economic strategy, as the country seeks to reduce its dependence on oil and gas revenues and create new opportunities for growth and prosperity.

At the heart of Oman Vision 2040 lies the goal of economic diversification. The government has outlined a comprehensive strategy that focuses on investing in high-potential sectors, enhancing the business environment and developing human capital.

By creating a more favourable ecosystem for growth and innovation, Oman seeks to attract foreign investment, stimulate entrepreneurship, and create new opportunities for its citizens.

One of the key sectors targeted for growth is tourism and hospitality. With its stunning natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and strategic location, Oman has immense potential to become a leading tourist destination.

By 2040, the government aims to invest \$31 billion into the tourism sector and boost the contribution of tourism to GDP from 2.6% to 6%, creating over half a million new jobs in the process.

Similarly, Oman is leveraging its strategic location to develop its logistics and transportation sector. With its deep-water ports, well-developed road network, and proximity to major trade routes, Oman is ideally positioned to become a hub for trade and commerce in



With its deep-water ports, well-developed road network, and proximity to major trade routes, Oman is ideally positioned to become a hub for trade and commerce in the region. Image for illustration only.

the region. Manufacturing and industry are also critical areas of focus for Oman's diversification efforts.

The government is promoting growth in sectors such as petrochemicals, mining, and fisheries, with the aim of creating value-added products and reducing import dependence. By investing in technology and innovation, Oman is fostering entrepreneurship and creating new economic opportunities in these sectors.

The Oman Investment Authority has also announced its plan to privatise 35 state-owned companies across various sectors by 2027. This strategic move aims to attract foreign investment, stimulate private sector growth, and enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of Oman's economy.

By reducing the government's direct involvement in these companies and opening them up to private investment, the government is creating new avenues for innovation and

entrepreneurship.

The tangible impact of these efforts is already evident, with the International Monetary Fund forecasting that Oman's economy is set for a rebound in 2024.

Standard Chartered's latest Global Focus report also paints a positive picture for Oman, as we forecast public debt to decline to 34% of GDP and external debt repayment is expected to amount to 5% of GDP in 2024.

We also project a continued improvement in Oman's credit rating as the Sultanate of Oman is poised to regain its investment grade rating as a result of continued reduction in its debt-to-GDP ratio, enhanced fiscal performance, and commitment to reforms. Inflation in Oman is also forecast to decelerate from 1.0% last year while the non-oil sector is set to grow to 2.5% this year.

Looking ahead, several factors are set to drive Oman's continued economic strength.

The recently announced Oman-UAE tech fund, with a

capital of USD 180 million, aims to support technology startups and foster innovation in both countries.

This initiative is expected to create new opportunities for entrepreneurs and drive the development of new industries in Oman.

The Oman Future Fund, with a capital of USD 5.2 billion, is another key initiative that will invest in strategic sectors and projects to drive economic growth and diversification.

This fund will focus on sectors such as tourism, logistics, manufacturing, and technology, with the aim of creating new jobs and boosting Oman's non-oil exports.

As Oman charts its course towards a more prosperous and sustainable future, Standard Chartered remains committed to supporting the country's economic goals. With our global expertise, innovative solutions, and deep understanding of the local market, we are well-positioned to help Oman

navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead. We believe that Oman Vision 2040 represents a bold and ambitious plan for the country's future, and we are excited to be part of this journey.

Oman's positive economic outlook is a testament to the government's visionary leadership and the resilience of its people.

By staying the course on its diversification strategy, investing in key sectors, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, Oman is well on its way to achieving Oman Vision 2040 goals.

As the country continues to navigate the challenges of the global economy, it is clear that Oman has the resources, the talent, and the determination to succeed.

With the support of partners like Standard Chartered, Oman is poised to become a model for economic diversification and sustainable growth in the region and beyond.

LAUNCHED IN 2020, OMAN VISION 2040, THE COUNTRY'S AMBITIOUS ROADMAP FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AIMS TO STEER THE NATION TOWARDS A MORE DIVERSIFIED, SUSTAINABLE, AND RESILIENT ECONOMY. THIS VISION REPRESENTS A CRITICAL SHIFT IN OMAN'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY, AS THE COUNTRY SEEKS TO REDUCE ITS DEPENDENCE ON OIL AND GAS REVENUES AND CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH AND PROSPERITY.

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INDIAN male 6 years experience in accounts/automobile/admin. Seeking for suitable opening in any field, currently in Oman. Contact: 78988055/ 92850930, email: ullasmon8@gmail.com

ACCOUNTANT & sales Executive, Indian male, 31 years, BA English, specialised in Accounting. 2 years experience in India & 6 years experience in Oman. Seeking position in Accounts/Sales fields (has Oman licence). Mob: 78805951. Gmail: akhilgopinath2017@gmail.com

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SIT. WANTED

29 YEARS old Indian female, MBA holder with 2 years experience. Seeking a suitable position. Currently in Muscat on visit visa. Contact: 78641071, shazashakeel@gmail.com

28 YEARS Experience in Oman in sales, marketing and management, Indian with DL and release. Looking for a good job change. Contact: 78501743.

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

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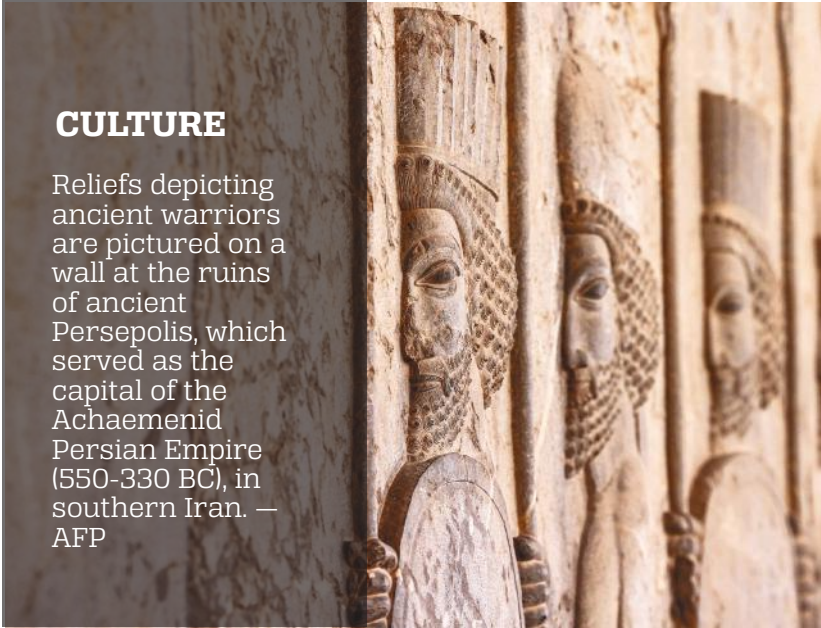
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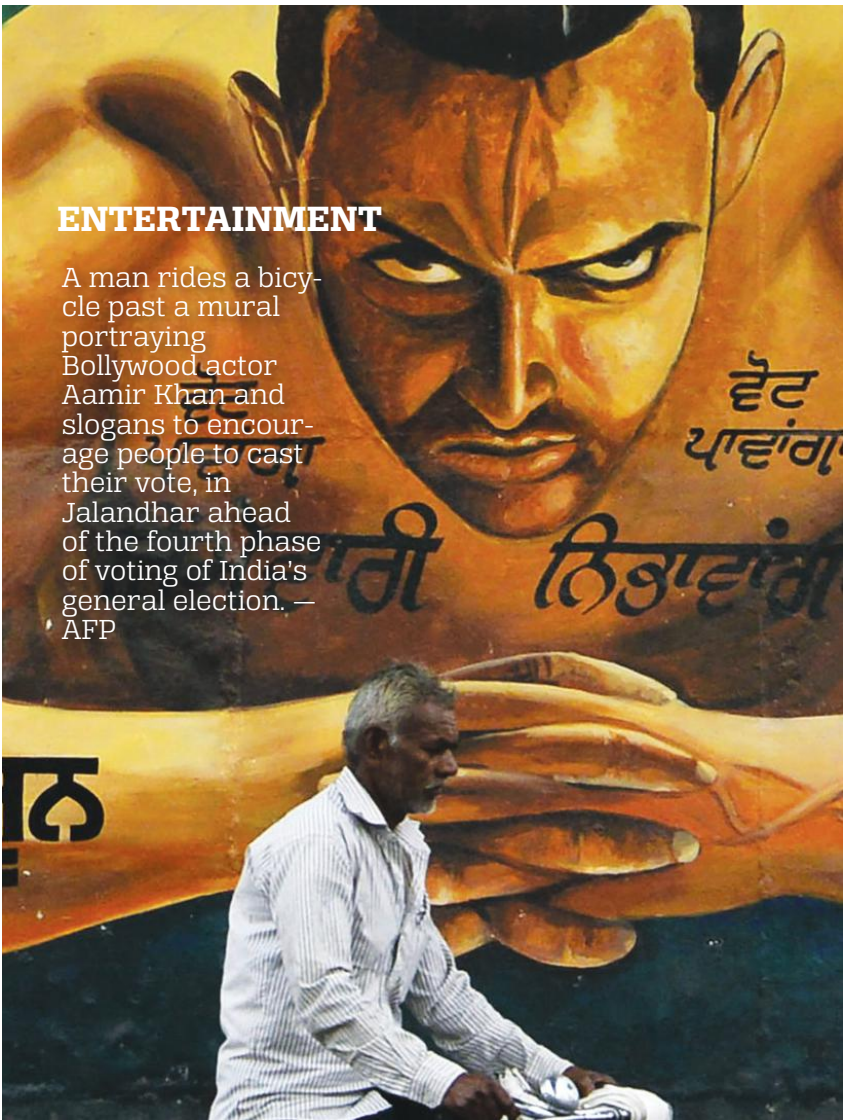
CELEBRATION

Buddhist believers hold lanterns during a Lotus Lantern parade in celebration of the birthday of Buddha in Seoul, South Korea. — AFP



CULTURE

Reliefs depicting ancient warriors are pictured on a wall at the ruins of ancient Persepolis, which served as the capital of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (550-330 BC), in southern Iran. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

A man rides a bicycle past a mural portraying Bollywood actor Aamir Khan and slogans to encourage people to cast their vote, in Jalandhar ahead of the fourth phase of voting of India's general election. — AFP



FILM

French producer Hugo Selignac smiles during a press conference for the film "Le Deuxieme Acte" (The Second Act) during the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



TRAVEL

The Regional History Museum is illuminated by the light installation called "Myths and Legends", as part of the Lunar Festival of Lights in Sofia, Bulgaria. — Reuters

Art & life

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AL BATINAH'S 'BY ARTIST' INITIATIVE TRANSFORMS KIDS INTO ENTREPRENEURS

The "By Artist" initiative, led by Laila al Rubaie, empowers children in Al Batinah to blend creativity with entrepreneurship. Through transforming artwork into marketable goods, it instills business acumen and fosters self-expression. The initiative garners community support, symbolising innovation and inspiring others to explore young artists' potential for economic benefit... P20



FILM

For Cannes film market, conditions ripe for success after early pandemic years

ALL THE ELEMENTS ARE in place for a successful Cannes film market after several subdued pandemic years, with a record line-up tempting buyers who are counting on a vibrant international market to eclipse weakness in the United States. While the Cannes Film Festival conjures visions of glamorous celebrities on the red carpet and yacht parties, the main attraction is the film market, where industry players, big and small, gather to do business. That market, which opened on Tuesday

and runs until May 22, is set to welcome a record number of participants, over 15,000 from more than 140 countries. In addition to films with Oscar potential, such as director Ali Abbasi's "The Apprentice," about a young Donald Trump, there is a large number of not-yet-made films up for grabs due to the Hollywood strikes. "The line-up is very strong," Kent Sanderson, president of independent film distributor Bleecker Street, said. And it includes more English-language films and established directors this year, such as Paul Schrader and Francis Ford Coppola, Sanderson said. "The list is better and of a higher level than I think I've ever seen," especially for films yet to be made, that have been held back due to the strikes in Hollywood, Scott Roxborough, European bureau chief for The Hollywood Reporter, said. "That, combined with the fact that the independent market in the United States, the distribution market, is still quite tough" will put the spotlight on Cannes, he said.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM Still, the mood is cautious following the earlier pandemic years, said Sanderson, whose Bleecker Street acquired the Cate Blanchett-led Group of Seven comedy



"Rumours" showing at Cannes. A big question is whether the US will match its foreign counterparts in terms of sales, said Sanderson. While there has been some recovery in

the years since the Covid-19 outbreak, with Europe doing better than the US, "nobody really sees a trajectory that would take us back to the level of ticket sales and the revenue that we saw in 2018, 2019," Roxborough said. Ticket sales in the United States and Canada peaked at \$11.9 billion in 2018. Last year, they came in at \$8.9 billion. Better sales prospects overseas have prompted film-makers to turn to the international market before the United States, Roxborough said. Just this month, MadRiver Pictures, led by CEO Marc Butan, closed a deal with key international distributors that sees it pre-selling rights to those partners, and allows MadRiver to bankroll and approve films before selling in the US, reported The Hollywood Reporter. The venture will focus on action, thriller and adventure features and will aim to produce two to three films a year. "For a lot of the independent streamers, there's a kind of insatiable demand for those types of movies because the supply isn't there," Butan said. "They're having trouble filling a release slate with titles that hit a certain level."

SPACE FOR BIG TITLES ONLY According to Butan, the changes in view-

ing habits spurred by streaming companies have been accompanied by higher-end commercial film studios shifting towards the larger-budget tent pole movies — films that are nearly guaranteed hits — leaving the mid-budget space to the independent studios. And for films outside the mainstream with "great scripts, great cast, great directors that are made at the right price — I think there's a real market for those," added Butan. However, "the stuff between those two zones, when you get kind of into the \$15-40 million space or something like that, it's really, really hard," Butan said. Clement Magar, of the China-focused Fortissimo Films, said he, too, has seen the market for small titles dry up. Instead, he said, companies go for big theatrical releases to earn money, or seek deals with larger platforms like Netflix — which tends to just buy big, mainstream Chinese titles. "What I've heard and what I've felt is that there's no more space for small titles basically to make it," said Magar, whose company is launching the animated Chinese feature, "The Umbrella Fairy," at the Cannes' market this year. "It used to be a small market, now it's zero market for small titles, and there's only

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LA BOHÈME - AN EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The world is commemorating the 100th anniversary of Puccini's passing, and for the occasion, Royal Opera House Muscat is welcoming a co-production with Monte Carlo Opera of Puccini's timeless work, *La Bohème* directed by Jean-Louis Grinda this week, on May 16th and 18th.

La Bohème is an opera in four acts, composed by Giacomo Puccini

between 1893 and 1895 to an Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, based on *Scènes de la vie de bohème* by Henri Murger. The story is set in Paris around 1830 and shows the Bohemian lifestyle of a poor seamstress and her artist friends.

In the run-up to this opera, the opera house delivered a programme of educational activities around *La Bohème* opera, allowing a range of students from Muscat University Theatre Club to have unparalleled access to the

artists. The students have been enjoying an immersive experience with a set of activities, workshops, meetings with artists, and more.

It all began with the regional premiere of the award-winning movie *La Bohème* by Italian director Mario Martone on April 23. The film was screened at ROHM's main foyer, transformed for the occasion into a cinema room. Once the lights were switched off the audience was transported to a very special setting in Rome where the opera was recreated in a building used by the Opera di Roma as a warehouse for their set and production materials.

The film won the Grand Prix at the Golden Prague Festival for its innovative approach, blending film and stage performances seamlessly. In a special message to the ROHM audience, Mario Martone, the director, extended a warm invitation to all to discover *La Bohème*, envisioning its characters not as mere artefacts but as vibrant, living individuals captured through Puccini's extraordinary music. The Opera movie gave a chance to discover this cinematographic masterpiece, revisiting how operas can be filmed uniquely.

Then it was time for Lunch Music at Opera Galleria and a bohemian lunch with the artists from *La Bohème* opera on May 11. Although the Lunch Music was opened to the public, the bohemian lunch was a special activity for the students, held at Richoux inside Opera Galleria. *Oman Daily Observer* was exclusively invited to attend this lunch.

During the Lunch Music, one could hear beautiful vocals while entering the Opera Galleria, and there you could see them — the artists were immersed in their performance with a seated audience spellbound. Some of the artists appeared from the audience itself, creating a dynamic scenography and a spectacular concert. *La Bohème*'s story is one of pure emotion, and the Lunch Music format gave the audience the possibility to watch the artists perform nearby compared to their usual performances on stage.

While having lunch with the opera singers, the students openly discussed the characters and how they were moved by the tragic life of Mimi. The conversations revolved around the lives of the main characters of *La*



Bohème, Rodolfo, Mimi, Marcelo, Schaunard, Colline and Musetta, their decisions, and their aspirations. Some of the students told *Oman Daily Observer* of the chance to immerse themselves into the world of opera, discovering the story of *La Bohème* and the role of opera singers. How to act on stage, convey emotions with your voice, and transform yourself into a character, were themes discussed during the exchange between artists and students. Some of the students interested in theatre and acting discovered the similarities between an opera story and a film or a theatre play. All were extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to go through this journey of workshops and activities with Royal Opera House Muscat, gaining insights into the world of opera.

As a final part of this educational journey, all students will attend *La Bohème* on May 16 and 18, filled with exclusive insights and a new perspective on this timeless opera.

According to ROHM, as part of this educational journey, students will be required to write a short essay giving

their thoughts and insights into *La Bohème*. The best essay will be selected by a mixed jury comprised of ROHM management and *Oman Daily Observer's* editorial team and will be published in *Oman Daily Observer*.

One of the objectives of ROHM is to strive to inspire its audience with a range of activities which are inclusive, accessible and engaging. Although some of the activities around *La Bohème* were reserved for the students, most of them such as Lunch Music or Opera Movie were open to the public. With the free-for-all talks and workshops ahead of some of its performances, ROHM invites its audience to dive deeper into the world of a composer, opera, or classical music piece. This is aligned with the opera house's vision as a centre of excellence in global cultural engagement.

A prominent regional institution, ROHM has been aiming to enrich lives through diverse artistic, cultural, and educational programmes. This is how ROHM has been inspiring audiences and nurturing creativity, fostering cultural vitality, unleashing talents, and promoting cultural awareness among

TRAVEL TALES

AVOIDING ALTITUDE SICKNESS:

How to Enjoy the Mountains Safely

AT LAST, YOU'VE arrived in your favourite mountain ready for your dream trek. There's just one problem: You can barely catch your breath, your stomach is churning and, in the morning, your head is throbbing.

The culprit? Altitude sickness, or in medical terms, acute mountain sickness — the various symptoms tied to your body's response to the higher altitude. As elevation increases, air pressure drops, meaning you get less oxygen from each full breath. It is temporarily uncomfortable for most people, but in extreme cases, severe altitude sickness can even be fatal. It sounds scary, but as Paul Nicolazzo, the president of Wilderness Medicine Training Center said, "There's really no reason to be afraid of going to altitude, as long as you understand what you're up against, and you obey some very, very basic rules."

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

AMS has four general symptoms: headache, gastrointestinal discomfort (nausea and lack of appetite), fatigue/weakness, and dizziness/light-headedness.

Many people experience the morning altitude headache, in which "your skull feels too small for the pulse that's coming," said Steve House, the founder of Uphill Athlete, a company that offers high-altitude endurance coaching.

It is also common to struggle with sleep at high altitudes. This occurs partly because the part of your nervous system responsible for

keeping you awake has kicked in to increase your respiratory rate, Nicolazzo said.

PAY ATTENTION TO ELEVATION

The two main drivers of AMS are how high you're going and how fast you're getting there. People with a higher altitude sensitivity might start experiencing challenges not far above 5,000 feet, say in places like Denver and Johannesburg. Anyone travelling above 8,000 feet may be at risk for altitude sickness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Serious adventure travellers — say, those trekking in the Himalayas, or climbing Mount Kilimanjaro — usually know they're headed for high altitudes. But the elevation of destinations like Mexico City (about 8,000 feet), the summit of Haleakala on Maui (10,023 feet), Cuzco (about 11,150 feet), or even Santa Fe, New Mexico (6,996 feet), might come as a surprise. To set expectations, check your destination's altitude in advance on Google Earth or the US Geological Survey national map viewer.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

If you have a condition like heart disease, heart failure, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, atrial fibrillation, lung disease, COPD, asthma or sleep apnea, you'll want to start paying close attention to how you're feeling at around 5,000 feet.

If you have a preexisting condition or have

had trouble with high altitudes before — or if you'll be going above 10,000 feet — consider visiting a specialist, who can help you prepare and may be able to advise you about the main drugs used to prevent and treat altitude sickness, Diamox (acetazolamide) and dexamethasone.

WATCH FOR RED FLAGS

A mild case of AMS can become moderate or severe if someone ascends too high or too fast. Most — but not all — people progress through the mild symptoms before reaching this level, which includes symptoms like dizziness, disorientation, severe nausea and extreme shortness of breath.

To guard against severe AMS, monitor how you feel, and if you're experiencing a persistent headache, trouble sleeping or other AMS symptoms, tell your companions and don't ascend any higher.

At the severe end of the continuum, if not treated, AMS could progress into high altitude pulmonary edema, in which fluid builds up in the lungs, or more rarely, high altitude cerebral edema, where fluid builds up in the brain. Both conditions can be fatal.

"There are three cures for altitude illness," House said, "descent, descent and descent." Anyone who appears confused, is coughing up fluid or seems to have trouble breathing or walking — symptoms of severe conditions like HACE or HACE — needs to be taken down immediately, Hackett said. "Just a thousand feet is all they have to go. And that could save their life." — NYT



AL BATINAH'S 'BY ARTIST' INITIATIVE TRANSFORMS KIDS INTO ENTREPRENEURS

BY SIHAM AL SAID

An extraordinary initiative dubbed "By Artist" is capturing widespread attention throughout Al Batinah, sparking the entrepreneurial spirit among the youth. Spearheaded by the visionary Laila al Rubaie, an ardent arts educator, this initiative transcends mere artistic creation, fostering the acumen to translate ideas into profitable ventures among children.

Its inception at Maathir Al Noor for Basic Education School heralds a remarkable transformation within the institution, garnering enthusiastic community support.

Laila champions the potency of creativity as a distinct form of self-expression, a catalyst for innovative thinking and a conduit for birthing novel concepts. "By Artist" transcends conventional art pedagogy, aiming to arm children with the realisation of their creative potential, nurture their talents into viable commodities, and cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset from an early age.

Imagine a classroom where budding artists metamorphose into enterprising individuals, where crayons and brushes serve as instruments for both artistic expression and business ingenuity. This project isn't just about colourful drawings and imaginative stories, it's about turning these creations into goods that can be sold and shared with the community. These young minds are not only exploring their artistic abilities, but also learning the value of hard work, creativity and financial independence.

The core idea behind "By Artist" was to bridge the gap between imagination and reality, transforming children's artistic creations into commercial products. These products were designed to cater to the diverse interests of the community across different age groups, like booklets and posters, notebooks and pads, illustrated children's stories, various cups, bags and wallets, water bottles and food containers, T-shirts and backpacks, and puzzle games. A set of products was announced under the brand "By Artist" and an e-shop was established.

Young artists benefit immensely from understanding the blend of creativity and business. It ensures sustainability, professional growth and broader visibility for their work. By mastering marketing, negotiation and financial management, they gain independence and adaptability in the ever-evolving art market.

Initiatives worldwide support this fusion: arts entrepreneurship programmes offer tailored education, incubators provide resources and mentorship, collaborative spaces foster networking, online platforms enable global reach, and community events offer exposure and learning opportunities. Through these avenues, young artists cultivate both artistic prowess and entrepreneurial acumen, laying a solid foundation for their future success in the creative industry.

"By Artist" is not just a school project either. It is a journey of empowerment, where children learn that their ideas have value, that their creativity can fuel their dreams, and that starting a business is within their reach. As these budding entrepreneurs navigate the process of turning imagination into income, they're not just earning money; they're earning confidence, resilience, and a lifelong passion for turning ideas into reality.

The parents were amazed at their children's talents and school ideas to transform their ideas into products and draw the road of business from an early age.

Hana al Kumi, a mom of one of these talented children, said, "I am really glad to see my little girl working hard, discussing business and her mind is growing towards entrepreneurship in the right way. To see her progressing and participating in such initiative makes me happy and proud."

A recent community survey revealed overwhelming satisfaction with the initiative, with an impressive 95 per cent expressing pride and approval upon learning about its impact. Laila is now strategising a marketing campaign to showcase her team's products, with active participation from the children themselves, garnering widespread support from the community.

Today, "By Artist" brands adorn various shops and libraries, where patrons eagerly purchase their delightful products.

As the "By Artist" initiative gained popularity, it became a symbol of innovation and creativity, inspiring other schools and communities to explore the unique potential of young artists and their imaginative worlds and show it to society and get the benefit of it for a better and brighter future.

